

Teachers College Reading and Writing Project
4th - 5th Grade Writing Curriculum 2007-2008
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An Overview of the 4th-5th Grade Writing Curriculum Calendar

This curricular calendar suggests one possible way of imagining the writing curriculum for the fourth and fifth grade classrooms across a school. You will see that we suggest month-long units of study, and that the design of this suggested curriculum places a premium on supporting youngsters' growing abilities to write narrative, expository (or persuasive), and poetic pieces. Informational and procedural writing, which are best taught within the content areas of social studies and science, are given less emphasis here because the calendar focus is a year-long curriculum for the writing workshop.

This curriculum was fashioned with input from hundreds of teachers, coaches, and principals, and pairs with Units of Study in 3-5 Writing (Heinemann). This curriculum takes into account New York State assessments; if you teach in a different state, you will need to adjust this plan according to your state's assessments.

This year-long course of study is part of a K-8 spiral curriculum, in which students receive instruction in narrative, expository, informational, poetic and procedural writing. This instruction enables them to work in each of these fundamental genres with increasing sophistication and decreasing reliance on scaffolds. For example, first graders write 'small moment stories' by recalling an event and retelling it "across their fingers," whereas third graders do similar work at a more advanced level when they make and revise timelines, ask, "What is the heart of my story?", and elongate the piece. Fourth and fifth graders, on the other hand, revise by plotting narratives against the graphic organizer of a "story mountain," with the goal of including two small-moments (or scenes) and revising the piece so the beginnings and ends relate to what the story is *really* about. Stories by middle school students expand more globally, making statements about what matters in the world. In this manner, from kindergarten through eighth grade, students will become progressively more capable of writing expository texts.

Although the suggested curriculum varies somewhat according to grade level so that it supports increasing sophistication and independence, it is also true that the essential skills of great writers remain consistent whether that writer is seven years old, seventeen years old...or seventy years old, for that matter. All of us try again and again to write with focus, detail, grace, structure, clarity, insight, honesty, and increasing control of

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conventions, and do so by rehearsing, planning, studying exemplar texts, drafting, rereading, revising, re-imagining, and editing.

There is nothing unplanned in the sequence of writing units of study. There are many other ways that teachers *could* plan their writing curriculum. We lay out this course of study for fourth and fifth graders because first, we believe it is a wise trajectory, one that stands on the shoulders of the work these children have done in the preceding year, and one that prepares them for middle school. Because this journey of study was fashioned with input from hundreds of teachers and coaches, and develops essential skills that students need, we believe it is worth careful consideration. The other reason we lay out this single line of work is that the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project's conference days and coach-courses cannot provide close support for hundreds of different iterations of a writing curriculum. Therefore, we want to alert you that during the year ahead, the Project's writing-related conference days will prepare for and support this line of work. Conference days will precede the units of study by at least a week, if not by two weeks.

On the other hand, nothing matters more in your teaching than your own personal investment in it. Modify this plan as you see fit so that you feel a sense of ownership over your teaching. We do encourage you, however, to work in sync with all of your grade-level colleagues so that your teaching can benefit from the groups' cumulative knowledge, and so that your grade-level meetings can be useful occasions for swapping minilessons, lesson planning in ways that inform your teaching, assessing student work, and planning ways to respond to your students' needs.

Why is Fourth Grade Similar to Fifth Grade: What about DBQ Writing?

We recognize that last year, many New York State fifth grade teachers felt a need to alter the sequence of units, rushing through narrative writing and personal writing, so that they could place a greater focus on teaching DBQ writing. We caution teachers against letting a social studies test, which asks for very low-level writing, wreck havoc on an entire year's progression of writing development. We are also confident that this year's fourth graders will come to fifth grade with much stronger writing skills than in previous years. Because these children will already have written essays and informational books, the DBQ should not be a difficult form of writing for these experienced writers! Furthermore, we hope children prepare for the social studies test during social studies time. We realize, however, that teachers may alter this sequence of units in any way that works for you and your children.

Assessment

Last year, the TCRWP developed and piloted an assessment tool which can now allow us to track student growth in writing. The tool has not only allowed us to hold ourselves accountable to supporting growth in writing, it has also helped us clarify the pathways

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along which developing writers travel. The assessment tool has allowed us to identify where a child is in a sequence of writing development, and to imagine realistic, do-able next steps for each child. This has made our conferring much more helpful and our teaching clearer. What began as an *assessment* tool has become an extraordinarily important *teaching* tool!

In '07-'08, we encourage all teachers across a school to agree upon a shared schoolwide form of tracking student growth in writing. Specifically, we encourage you to track individual writers' growth in narrative and informational/essay writing, as well as their command of writing conventions. You will see that we've set aside specific times in the year for formative assessments; we are providing more information about recommended assessments in other documents.

Your first assessments need to occur at the very start of your year. Your children come to you with competencies and histories as writers. You cannot teach well unless you take the time to learn what children already know while also helping them reach for goals that are within their grasp. In addition, you will want to illustrate to parents and children all the ways in which children grow as writers over the course of the year. To do this, it is important to capture the 'Before' picture for comparison to the 'After'.

At the beginning of the year, we recommend that you devote one full day's writing workshop – specifically fifty minutes – to a writing-on-demand assessment of narrative writing. We cannot stress enough that you cannot scaffold kids' work during this assessment. Do *not* remind children of the qualities of good narrative writing, do *not* share examples of powerful texts, and definitely do *not* confer with writers. This needs to be a hands-off assessment. Say to your children, "I'm dying to get to know you as writers. Would you take today's writing workshop—you can have a full fifty minutes if you want—and write a focused personal narrative, a small-moment true story, which shows what you know about writing? Write about one time when you did something particular, something you remember well." Repeat those instructions more than once. Say, "Usually, I will confer with you and you will confer with each other, but for today, I want to learn what you can do when you are on your own as a writer. So just do your best – remember that you will be writing a focused personal narrative, a small-moment true story, a piece which shows what you know about writing."

Some schools may decide to give children a second day to revise and edit, and as long as that is a school-wide, district-wide decision, that is up to you. If you choose to do so, we suggest you ask for this work to be done in a single day. In this scenario, the assessment will not show you how children revise for publication, but future published pieces will demonstrate this skill. It is important to recognize that one can learn a lot from one day's writing, and it will be easier to repeat this on-demand assessment at the end of your two months' work with personal narrative writing if the on-demand task is not time consuming.

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In a separate document, you will receive the rubric that my colleagues and I have developed, which tracks children's progress in narrative writing. This will also be available on our website: <http://rwproject.tc.columbia.edu>.

In last year's curricular calendar, we worried that saying, "Welcome to a new year. I want to begin by evaluating you," might seem harsh and we suggested that you could soften this by saying that you can't wait until the end of September before having some of your children's writing to display on bulletin boards. We suggested that you tell children that they won't have a chance to work long on the piece because you are so eager to have their stories up in the room, and this was why they needed to plan, draft, revise, and edit in just one day. The problem with that advice was that an extraordinary number of teachers could not resist assisting students' writing if that writing was going to be displayed! If you feel this way, then tell children this writing is just for you to get to know them, and then store it in their portfolios. But if you feel comfortable displaying their first draft writing, it's a nice idea to create a purpose for this initial assessment piece.

In any case, you will want to study what your children do when asked to write focused narratives—this will help you establish a base-line understanding of what your students know about the qualities of good narrative writing. You'll find that the narrative scale we give you has been designed with the TCRWP's instruction in mind so you may discover that your children's pieces don't really fall anywhere on the scale. This will most likely happen if the children are fairly adept writers but have never been taught to focus their narratives.

When you look over children's work, take note of whether children have been taught and are using rudimentary concepts. Look, for example, for evidence that children are writing *focused* narratives. Also look to see if they are writing structured pieces (for now this will usually mean chronologically structured pieces). Can these pieces be described as stories; that is, does the main character (the writer, in this instance) proceed through a plot-line of actions and reactions? Are children *storytelling* rather than summarizing and commenting on events? Are they using dialogue and details? Writing with end punctuation? Developing their characters? Angling the story to highlight their focal point? Do they seem to care not only about *what* they write, but also about *how* they write it?

You will assess your children's narrative writing through another on-demand piece, which you'll ask for at the end of October (or whenever you complete this fall's work with narrative writing). You'll want to assess again after your work with fiction. You should see that even within just two months, your children will have developed in fairly dramatic ways, but you need not wait until you assess to see evidence of growth. Any entry that a child writes within the narrative units of study can give you a helpful window in to a child's progress.

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You will want to assess expository writing, both before-and-after your instruction in that genre, in a similar way. By the start of November, when you will probably launch your work with expository writing, the Project will have developed a tool for tracking student growth in expository writing.

The aforementioned assessments help you look at qualities and structures of writing, but do not focus on grammar, spelling, or sentence complexity. The TCRWP has developed a tool for assessing growth in this area, and you should expect to learn about these tools and procedures over the next few months.

Grammar and Conventions in the Writing Curricular Calendar

The embedded grammar instruction in the curriculum is becoming more direct, it is being taught more often, and we are paying more attention to it. We believe that academic English, which is derived from book language, from reading, and from grammar instruction, can be acquired at school and that grammar instruction helps students become more powerful writers. The method will be direct instruction conducted during writing workshop, and it can be in the form of a minilesson, small group work, or a one-on-one conference. The teacher will model her own writing and the student will try what the teacher is demonstrating, either by continuing the teacher's writing or by trying the skill in his or her own writing. Other forms of instruction may include inquiry into how published authors structure their sentences and use punctuation, as well as coaching and demonstration on how students can mentor themselves with published authors. In reading workshop, we may emphasize paying attention to the punctuation and the tone of the story to analyze the author's purpose and effect.

This work will be the most beneficial if it functions as part of the writing workshop curriculum, which means planning specific grammar lessons for large or small group instruction and using differentiation. For example, writers who are writing narratives in which people speak are ready for lessons on how to punctuate dialogue. Writers who combine actions in one sentence are ready for conjunctions. Writers who include lots of description are ready for clauses set off by commas. Children benefit most from this instruction when it helps them be more powerful in the moment, rather than studying grammar in isolation from their writing projects.

There are several ways to assess students' readiness, growth, and control of grammar and conventions. One way, which Teachers College Reading and Writing Project classrooms have been piloting this year, is to use several lenses to assess student writing, with each lens suggesting levels of development. These lenses include syntactical complexity, punctuation, conjunctions, pronoun usage, subject verb agreement, verb tense, spelling, and vocabulary. In each of these areas we can study students' development and readiness for new instruction.

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One *crucial* point is that students will move through stages of using and confusing new constructs before they master them. This means that getting things slightly wrong can be a sign of growth. If we only ‘fix’ students’ writing, or tell them to be ‘correct’ then they may revert to simpler vocabulary and sentence structure that they are sure they know how to punctuate. For instance, when students first start moving into past tense, they may not know all the forms of irregular verbs and they may confuse some. If we emphasize only accuracy, they will revert to present tense or to safe verbs they know. In the same way, they may not dare write longer sentences if they’re not sure how to punctuate them. Common stages of development include *unfamiliarity, familiarity and experimentation, using and confusing, mastery and control*. Just as students attempting more sophisticated words may miss some spelling but should be encouraged for taking risks, students who try to master more complex grammar are ready for the next lesson. For instance, rather than continuing to make their sentences short and simple and accurate, they may be ready to learn how to combine clauses and use conjunctions.

Another new area of assessment this year is that of syntactical complexity. A good measure of syntactic maturity in writing is the average length (how many words there are) of the grammatical sentence, or independent clause (what Hunt calls the T-unit (Hunt, 1965). For instance, if a student writes: *I went to the store. I bought some candy. I met Lisa*, these are three independent T-units or simple sentences, and each one is short, with few words. This is simple syntax. More complex syntax has more words, often more use of conjunctions, and a more complicated sentence structure: *Yesterday I went to the store, where I bought some candy and met Lisa, who was glad to see me*. Surprisingly, some of our writers who are most struggling with punctuation are showing some complicated syntax that demonstrates that they are ready for punctuation lessons.

You probably want to start the year by assessing and then teaching (if needed), capitalization, and then ending punctuation. If this is a recall lesson for students, make it a real writing lesson by teaching how ending punctuation—and perhaps punctuation in general—affects tone in our writing. Students begin the year writing personal narratives, so it makes sense to teach them how to punctuate dialogue. You need to teach all students to write in paragraph structure, teaching them some of the cues for narrative paragraphs such as when a new character enters, time changes, or the setting changes. Next, teach students to read over their writing, and to put a period where a thought or action ends—this will eliminate a lot of run-on sentences quickly and with a minimum of fuss. Most students speak in sentences; they can write them.

In the second narrative unit, you may want to teach students to use what they have learned about conventions so far (beginning and ending punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, punctuating dialogue) as they write in their notebooks and their drafts. You may teach some new punctuation then, such as the use of commas in lists. Teach pronouns and subject-verb agreement in small groups as needed.

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In the third unit, teach students to recall these conventions as they turn to non-narrative writing. You may want to re-teach ending punctuation, showing how it affects the tone of non-narrative writing. You will want to re-teach paragraph structure in non-narrative writing. Again, some of this can be small group instruction. Always teach students to use all the conventions they have learned so far to be effective editors of their own and others' writing and to write drafts that are more accurate in terms of conventions. This also prepares them for the ELA exam.

After the exam, as students return to writing stories, this might be a good time for them to look closely at verb tense and verb forms, including regular and irregular verbs, and the less common tenses such as future and conditional. If students have control of simple sentences, then teach them how to punctuate more complicated sentences by adding simple clauses set off by commas and/or conjunctions. Be sure to assess students to learn how they are using conventions in their notebook entries and their first drafts. If needed, form small groups around any convention that merits more attention. For example, in a small group you can help students who get confused distinguishing singular and plural pronouns, or between apostrophes for possessives and contractions.

Students benefit if they have opportunities to pay attention to punctuation in reading, in read-aloud, shared reading, and when they read aloud. This fluency work is sure to help their reading if we do it in the guise of pursuing prosody—making the text mean more because of the way we read it. Thus we can teach students to imagine what a part of the story sounds like, using what they know about what is happening in the story, the mood or tone of that part of the story, what they know about the character, and the punctuation.

You may also wish to conduct a few punctuation inquiries. During inquiries, students look closely at how published authors use punctuation through a close investigation of their writing. The most common method of instruction entails explicit teaching in the form of a mini-lesson during the writing workshop, where students are taught strategies for punctuation usage and then have opportunities to try them out in their writing. You may need extra time for the grammar work, especially for pronoun and verb forms, and we recommend including this work in your word study time.

Fourth-Fifth Grade Writing Calendar

September	Launching the Writing Workshop
October	Raising the Level of Narrative Writing
November	The Personal Essay
December/Early January	Writing with Independence: Preparing for the Writing Tasks of the State Test (ELA Exam): The Extended Response Essays
Mid January/ February	Fiction
March	Author Your Own Nonfiction Unit of Study: Literary Essay or Writing to Make a Real World Difference
April	Poetry

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May	Memoir: Teach the Art of Writing Well
June	Independent Writing Projects

Unit 1 - Launching the Writing Workshop

September

September is always a challenging month because we inevitably work towards two rather different goals: We want to establish well-managed, productive classrooms *and* we want to rally children to work with enthusiasm on projects of great importance. In the fourth and fifth grade writing workshop, September is an important time to remind children of what they learned in preceding grades and to be sure children are writing with increasing stamina, independence and resourcefulness. Be sure to use the on-demand writing assessment described earlier in this document and the TCRWP's tool for assessing narrative writing to see what your children can already do as narrative writers and to tailor your teaching so that you take them on a journey towards increasing proficiency. This may mean that you bring some of the teaching ideas in October's write-up into your September workshop, and it will also mean you use the narrative tool to inform your teaching.

Lift the Level of Work: Re-visit Narrative Writing in Ways Which Support Stamina in Writing

You will want to think about the writing processes and work habits that your particular class of children established in the preceding year, and about ways in which you can ratchet up expectations so children approach their writing with new rigor and independence. For example, consider the way in which your children used their writers' notebooks during the preceding year. If children did not come to see these as indispensable tools for living writerly lives and as workbenches for experimenting with different strategies, you will want to start the year off by keeping a writer's notebook alongside your children. You will also want to begin the year by dedicating yourself and the class to the prospect of keeping notebooks in more writerly ways, using these tools just as professional writers do. The single most important way to do this will be to model your own commitment to a writers' notebook. Perhaps you'll say to children, "This summer I tried living like a writer, and my writer's notebook became an incredibly important tool for me. Let me walk you through my notebook and show you some of the things I did that I hope you do as well." That is, it will be important to try to give writers' notebooks a new lease on life.

If you do not rally children to invest in these notebooks now, at the start of the year, the chances that they will learn to care about them later in the year are not great. Make this a priority!

Certainly by the time children are in fourth grade, the writers' notebooks need to travel between home and school, with children writing entries in them every night at home as

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well as in school. If you need to spend a week or two inducting children into the ritual of carrying their notebooks to home *and then back again to school*, you may want to start the year off with a Writer's Notepad (perhaps made by stapling some pages together). You'll want to help children disassemble these at the end of a week, taping the pages into their writer's notebooks. Act as if it is crucial that children remember to bring these notepads between home and school so you use them as a way to induct children into the very important habit of carrying both writers' notebooks (and reading books) back and forth between home and school. Of course, before long, children should be able to carry *notebooks* themselves between home and school without there being a great risk that they'll leave these at home. By using evenings as well as school-time as a time for gathering entries, this should double the volume of writing that children do in their notebooks—a worthy goal!

Note that the homework assignments that you give to your children do matter. If you invest in homework, then your children will as well and you can double the time your children spend on writing. We recommend you and your colleagues get hold of the DVD that is part of *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3-5*. There are hundreds of carefully designed homework assignments in these, aligned to this curricular calendar. Each can be personalized by you for your particular children. Thoughtful, well-designed homework assignments double as a way to communicate with parents so they'll provide you with extra dividends.

As you approach this first unit of study, one of your goals will be to teach students to write with volume and stamina. It should be no-big-deal for a fourth grader to produce a full page of writing every day in school and an equal amount of writing at home. This means that your children will be writing *at least* eight-to-ten pages a week in their writers' notebook (some weeks they will work outside the notebook on drafts). If you question whether this is a realistic expectation, remember that you can learn how much writing your kids can produce in, say, fifteen minutes of writing, if one day, once your kids are accustomed to generating ideas for writing, you ask them to remain in the meeting area and to write alongside each other for a bit. Don't tell them that your goal will be to notice the length of writing they produce in fifteen minutes of writing time, but *do* rally them to work productively alongside each other. "Let's not waste a second," you can say. "Let's really get a lot of writing done." If, after fifteen minutes of straight writing, you ask children to mark where they began and stopped writing and to count the number of lines they produced, then double that number. This new number can give you a rough index for the amount of text that child can do in one day's writing workshop or one evening's writing time. That is, certainly the child should be able to produce *twice* that amount of writing each day and again, each evening. This will help you see that most children in your class can be held to standards for production that are considerably higher than those to which you've become accustomed. It can also help you see that some children need small-group instruction and lots of praise (a star for half a page, encouragement to keep going, etc.) geared towards helping them write more quickly.

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One way to support more stamina is to approach the first unit of the year expecting children to cycle through the writing process quickly enough that they each write two drafts in this first month of the year. This means that first, children will gather ten or so pages of narrative entries (during the first week of the unit), then they'll select one entry as their seed idea and spend two days (and two pages of their notebook) drafting and revising timelines and leads for their stories, mulling over the meaning they want to highlight in the story and storytelling to each other. Then, by the end of the second week, they'll devote one intense day to producing Draft One of that first story. Drafts are written outside the notebook. If you decide to work towards two cycles through narrative writing in the first month, you'll forego revision for now. Instead, during the third week of the unit, children can select a second entry to be their second seed idea and again plan for and then (well before the end of that week) again devote a day to writing Draft One, this time of a second true story. Before the third week is over, then, writers will have selected a favorite story from the two they will have written, and begun to revise that draft. Eventually the selected, revised draft will need to be edited and recopied for publication. Editing and recopying should involve only two days at the end of the unit. This timetable means that during this first unit, writers will progress at a fast clip through two cycles of narrative writing.

Of course, you could alternatively decide to take more time with each step of the process so that writers only produce one piece of writing in September. If you opt for this course of action, in which children produce just one as-good-as-possible piece, we recommend extending the initial stage in which they collect entries to be sure they don't end up sitting over the same story for days, fiddling with it and developing a writing-process that incorporates a lot of dawdling and fiddling and recopying.

Recruit Student Investment in the Writing Workshop

At the start of the year, you will probably decide to devote some time to learning about children's histories as writers. You may ask children to write about times in their lives when writing has been a particularly good thing, or to think over what it is they need from a writing partner, and then you may set up table conversations in which children talk in foursomes about any one of these questions. Then you might convene the class for a whole group conversation which draws on these smaller conversations. If you do this, let children know their ideas are helping you plan how writing will go in your classroom (even if, in fact, you'd already planned to do some of what they suggest). "Are you saying it really helped you to talk about your writing with a partner? Thanks for giving me the idea that we should have writing partners! This year, let's follow John's suggestion and work with partners." In this fashion, children can join together to think about the question, "What kind of a writing community do we want to form together?"

One way to engage children in conversations about writing is to read books and excerpts in which writers describe their writing lives. Use these to provoke conversations. We

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recommend, for example, Reynolds' *Ish*, Baylor's *I'm in Charge of Celebrations*, excerpts from Fletcher's *A Writer's Notebook*, Janeczko's *Seeing the Blue Between*, Roni Schotter's *Nothing Ever Happens on 90th St.*, excerpts from *Speaking of Journals*, edited by Paula Graham, and so forth.

Strategies for Generating Narrative Writing

Of course, at the start of this year (as at the start of every year) you will want to help your children know their lives are brimming with stories. Fourth and fifth graders will hopefully have been in a writing workshop the previous year, so remind them that they already have a repertoire of strategies writers use to come up with ideas for personal narrative stories. Ask them to share strategies they already know and compile these on a chart, *Strategies for Generating Narrative Writing*. A word of caution: A strategy, by definition, involves a step-by-step procedure. So the items on your chart can't be topics (People, Places, etc.) but instead need to be procedures (Jot down a person you care about, brainstorm several times you recall, select one of these, make a movie in your mind of that time, storytell on the page). Tell children that this year, you will teach them how to use those familiar strategies *really well*, like professional writers do.

For example, you can tell children that they probably already know that writers sometimes think of a person who matters to us, then list several small moments we've experienced with that person, choosing one of these to write as a story. But children may not realize that writers take no more than five minutes to *quickly* jot down a person who matters, to list a few small moments we've spent with that person, and then to select one of these moments and begin writing the "long" story of it down the page. This process of brainstorming does not encompass one day's writing workshop!

Also teach children that when they list small moments they have spent with a person, each moment is best described in a sentence (or a long phrase), not in a single word. If a child writes "Joe" and under that name writes "baseball," that child is not set up to produce a focused narrative. But if under the name "Joe," the child writes, "one time Joe taught me how to catch a baseball," then the child is off to a good start towards writing a narrative. The other important thing to teach children is that in a single day of writing, the child will not produce just one entry. The child uses a strategy to generate an idea for writing, writes the entry, and then, fairly often, the child has time to return to the original brainstorming work and select a second idea and write another entry.

By all means, study the entries your children write to see evidence of their understanding of narrative writing and the qualities of good writing. The wonderful thing about teaching writing is that we, as teachers, are given feedback on our teaching. If you are teaching children to focus their narrative writing about small moments and to write with details, you can see right away whether your teaching has traction. And make sure it does!

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By the second or third day of the writing workshop, you will want to help children realize that the strategies they are learning are cumulative. For example, if, on the first day of the writing workshop, you taught children that writers sometimes think of a *person* who matters to us and brainstorm small moments we spent with that person (moments we remember with crystal clarity), and then on the next day, you taught them that writers sometimes can think of a *place* we remember well, brainstorming small moments we spent in that place and then choosing one to write in detail, at the end of that minilesson, it will be important to remind children they can draw on *either* of those strategies in order to generate that day's writing. Each day's teaching point needs to cumulate with the teaching points from days that have gone before it. During the workshop, children should draw on their expanding repertoire of strategies. Take a count one day. How many of the kids are using the strategy you taught that day? Hopefully less than half! How many are drawing on strategies they also learned on previous days, or ones they have invented? If most of your class routinely does only whatever you talk about in that day's minilesson, you'll want to lend your full weight toward reminding writers to draw on their full repertoire of strategies.

Katherine Bomer's *My Writing Life* suggests more strategies for generating writing, as does *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3-5*. You could read even just a little bit of Byrd Baylor's picture book, *I'm in Charge of Celebrations*, and help children learn that writers honor and celebrate and notice the small moments of our lives. We go through life saying, "This matters," and recording small moments that merit celebration. You could encourage children to think of issues they care about, such as bullying, and to generate and draw from a list of focused episodes pertaining to that issue.

Keep in mind, however, that children do not need (nor profit from) more than three or four strategies for generating personal narratives, because any of these strategies can be used over and over. Remember, too, that in only one day you can lay out several possible strategies for generating writing. You'll demonstrate one in the minilesson, another in your mid-workshop teaching point, still another in your share. If every day, day after day, your minilesson becomes a time to teach a new strategy for generating writing, you will end up using these strategies just as some teachers use story starters. The message you will convey will be, "Wait until I can get you started on today's piece of writing." It is crucial that children can use and reuse their small repertoire of strategies, and do so with independence.

Then, too, it is important that children begin to rely less and less on strategies for generating writing, coming to regard life itself as one big source of stories! As soon as your children are living like writers, they'll find that true stories come to mind without reliance on a particular strategy at all. Everything that a person sees and does and thinks and feels can remind us of the stories we have to tell.

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As you teach *strategies* for generating writing, you will also teach *qualities* of effective writing. Above all, teach children to write with focus and detail. It is likely that your children have had experience doing this in third grade, but you will want to re-teach these concepts. Detail, especially, cannot be over-emphasized. Specifically, in this first unit, you will want to celebrate the fact that stories of significance can be found in the smallest and most ordinary occasions.

Touchstone Texts

As children learn about narrative writing, some of the lessons will be *explicit*, taught in minilessons and conferences. But some of the lessons will be *implicit*, gleaned as children study texts that sound like those you hope they will soon write. Even just one dearly loved and closely studied text can infuse a writing workshop with new energy. You might invite children to study “Eating the World” and “Statue” from Ralph Fletcher’s memoir, *Marshfield Dreams*, “Mr. Entwhistle” and “Not Enough Emilys” from Jean Little’s *Hey World, Here I Am!*, “Everything Will Be Okay” from James Howe’s *When I Was Your Age*, Gary Soto’s “The Bike” in *A Summer Life*, Cynthia Rylant’s *I’ll Be Back Again*, or a text from Donald Graves’ *Baseball, Snakes and Summer Squash: Poems About Growing Up*. These same excerpts could also be studied in the next unit and again in the memoir unit, so select just one or two for now.

Rehearsing and Drafting in Ways Which Set Children Up to Write Effective Narratives

Some children will need to be taught the essentials of narrative writing. Depending on their previous writing experiences, some will need to learn that narratives are just that—stories. In a personal narrative, one character (presumably the writer) experiences one thing, then the next, then the next. Children also learn that their narratives will be more effective if the writer has zoomed in on a small episode. With reminders, they can write entries in which they retell not the entire visit to grandma’s farm but rather the portion of their visit when the pigs got loose. The main reason to “zoom in” is that this makes it more likely that the writer will relive an episode with enough detail that the reader, too, can experience the event.

Remind students of an important strategy they should already have used in previous years’ writing workshops, that of making a movie in the mind in order to write a story. If a student talks “all about” an event, summarizing it with sentences such as, “It was a good baseball game. We won 6 to 2. I got a lot of hits. It was exciting,” then the child is *commenting on* the game rather than *telling the story* of it. The child has not yet grasped the idea of writing in a storyteller’s voice. If, on the other hand, his piece begins, “I grabbed a bat and walked up to the plate. I looked at the pitcher and nodded. “I’m ready,” I said,” then the child is writing a story. Most children need to be reminded to make movies in their mind and to write so readers can picture exactly what is happening.

After children generate narrative entries for a week (or longer, if you envision children writing just one piece in the first month,) you will want to teach them to reread these and

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to each choose one entry to develop into a seed idea. The writer can star the selected entry. Then you'll need to teach the writer some strategies for rehearsing for writing. As children become more experienced, they can do more and more rehearsal. Most fourth and fifth grades profit from being told that writers often take a few minutes to plan for our writing. If we're writing a nonfiction book, we plan by making outlines with main ideas and support information or by making flow charts breaking a subject into smaller chunks. But when we are writing narratives, the easiest way to plan a piece is to make alternate timelines. "Maybe my story will go like this?" we can say. "Or maybe like this." It is key to try several possible timelines and especially, to revise the timelines. Which dot on the timeline is not essential to the heart of the story? Which dot needs to be expanded (by slowing time down) into a series of dots? Timelines are *only* useful if they are drafted and revised!

Invite children to rehearse for writing also by drafting a bunch of different leads. You may want to remind children that writers often start a story with dialogue or with a small action or by conveying the setting. The real purpose of this instruction is not just to produce a more dramatic lead. Instead, this technique dislodges students from summarizing events and moves them toward making movies in their minds and reliving events on the page. This may not happen automatically, but if children take a day or two to draft and revise leads, this gives us, as teachers, a chance to move among the writers, teaching teach into the start of their stories. This will make it more likely that children *storytell* rather than summarize, and that they write with detail.

Once a writer has drafted and revised a timeline which outlines the sequence of the event and has written a few possible leads for the story, it's time to draft the story. Once in a while, a writer stays too close to the timeline. If one dot on the timeline says, "Put on my roller skates" and the next dot says, "skated with my father" it would be a big problem if the student's story ends up with, "I put on my roller skates. Then I skated with my father." You will need instead to teach children that a writer rereads the label beside the first dot. In this instance, the writer rereads the caption beside the dot that says, "put on my roller skates." Then the writer makes a movie in his mind, recounting exactly how this happened. What did the writer do or say first? What *exactly* did the writer do? Say? (You'll need to remind children that it is okay to invent what you *probably* did or said.) Then the writer will *storytell* the story of that one dot:

"I arrived early at Skate Key, carrying my roller skates. All the benches were empty so I sat on the first one I saw. I stuck one foot, then the next, into roller skates, and pulled the straps tight around my ankle. The skates felt tight. I wondered if my feet had grown. I wiggled my toes. They felt okay."

Then and only then, can the writer progress to the second dot on the timeline! You may decide to use paper-design as a way to elaborate on each 'dot.' If you decide to do so, teach the child to fold paper in half at the mid-line (the waist), to write one dot from the

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timeline at the top of each half-sheet, then to write the whole story of that one dot on the half-sheet below it.

After children have created elaborated stories by pointing to a dot, making a movie in their minds of the story represented by that dot, and telling this story in detail to a partner, then progressing in a similar way through the other dots, you'll want to decide whether to ask kids to simply draft the story that they've told to a partner, or whether you want to encourage each child to transfer the dots of the storyline onto a folded over sheet of paper, with the first dot at the top of the first half page, then the next dot at the top of the next half-page....Then each child can write a narrative, with the story of each 'dot' occupying each page of the booklet.

Either way, once the child has planned the story we strongly suggest you teach children to write the whole draft, quickly, non-stop, in a single day's writing workshop. The draft needs to be written outside the notebook on one sided paper. The writer may not actually finish the whole story but we hope that stories are vastly more coherent and powerful when they are written quickly, under pressure and in one sitting. The children will have time later to revise, to finish any unfinished bits, but don't let them stretch the writing of their first draft out over several days!

Revision

Once your children have written one draft of a story, then you'll want to teach them to revise. Study their drafts to see what it is that you can teach them, remembering that revision is a time for major improvements and not for merely fixing up punctuation or altering words. You'll want to decide on the sort of revision you imagine your children doing at this point in the year. The central question to ask yourself is whether you see their revision as doctoring up the one draft. Your answer will come from various things. First, if children will be cycling through the process of writing two narratives twice within this one month, you will need all their revisions to be abbreviated, and mostly they'll only revise the draft they select (after writing a rough draft of two different stories). Second, you need to keep in mind what children learned in previous years. If you are teaching fifth graders who have been in writing workshops for several years, expect more dramatic revisions - a second draft is not much to ask. But if this is your children's introduction to the writing workshop, it is enough to ask them to scissor and tape their existing draft as they revise sections of it.

Sometimes, you will see that children's drafts are swamped with dialogue. Readers often can't discern even who is speaking or what is happening. When you see this sort of writing, keep in mind that the child is probably making movies in the mind, which is a great thing, and he or she simply hasn't mastered this yet. The over-reliance on dialogue represents a step ahead, yet it poses problems that need to be addressed. Teach children that writers sometimes realize, after we've written a draft, that our writing provides only a sound-track, and so we revise our writing to show the aspects of the story that we have

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left out. Teach these children to alternate between writing an action, a thought, and dialogue. This may seem mechanical (no writer thinks about writing in this way), but if writers aim for this variety for a few days, their writing will become stronger.

The most effective way to support revision is to teach children that a writer rereads his or her story, locating the heart of the story, and then the writer “stretches that part out,” progressing in smaller steps through the sequence of events, writing in more detail.” We sometimes refer to “Eleven,” a story in Sandra Cisneros’ *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*. Rachel puts first one arm, then another, into a red sweater. The process is dragged out in a very step-by-step way. This accentuates Rachel’s abhorrence to this sweater, all itchy and full of germs that weren’t even hers.

It is also important to teach children that writers not only tell the *external* sequence of events; we also relay the *internal* events—what we noticed, remembered, thought.... When you study your children’s writing, noticing where they are in the assessment tool described earlier, you’ll see other revision lessons that are within grasp for your children. Look at the writing which is a notched or two beyond the work most of your children are producing, and notice on the assessment tool, specific characteristics of just-beyond-reach texts. Then teach your children how they can revise their writing in ways that raise the texts just a notch.

Unit 2 - Raising the Level of Narrative Writing

October

We believe it is absolutely crucial for your children to return to a second cycle with narrative writing. We linger for two months within this one kind of writing because we know that real progress comes not from constantly exposing children to yet another form of writing but from working within any one form in order to help children write longer, more significant, more conventional, and more graceful texts. It is especially important that children learn to write effective narratives because every other kind of writing they will do relies upon them being skilled at writing narratives. For example, stories entail at least 50% of most essays, only these stories are angled in order to advance ideas. The real goal of this unit, then, is not to improve the quality of *narrative* writing but to improve the quality of writing—and of the *writers*—in general.

You will probably begin this unit by telling children they will be re-visiting narrative writing (don’t mask this fact!), and then by helping them understand that they will need to draw on all they already know. This is a perfect opportunity to teach children that writers carry a cumulative repertoire of strategies (a tool box of sorts), drawing on these tools as needed. For example, you might say, “You already have a whole repertoire of strategies for generating narrative writing,” and briefly direct children’s attention to a chart listing strategies for generating writing which you know your students learned during the preceding unit.

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By referring to all that students already know and inviting them to draw upon that full repertoire, you can emphasize both that learning to write is cumulative and that any new work that writers do will always stand on the shoulders of previous work. Children will have already learned that writers sometimes think about a person or a place or a thing that is important to them, jot that person, place or thing down, and then brainstorm small moments we spent with that person, place or thing. You will certainly remind children to draw on those strategies again during this unit. But on the other hand, if the stories children wrote in September were sequenced, detailed, and a bit dull, you'll want to tell them that this month they'll bring more meaning into their writing. Sometimes, if writers want to generate ideas for really powerful stories, we use particular strategies that make it likely our stories will be meaningful (and, in truth, that yield shapely stories). For example, when a writer wants to write a powerful personal narrative, we sometimes write about the first (or last) time we did something, or about a time we learned something, or a time we felt a strong emotion, including hope, worry, sadness. We sometimes generate ideas for writing by thinking about major issues in our lives, such as bullying, family pressure, fitting in at school. Then we think of specific times when we struggled with that issue. The resulting stories are often significant and shapely.

Select a Seed Idea and Then Study Touchstone Texts in Ways Which Help You Plan for the Texts You'll Soon Be Writing

Remember that you never need to devote more than two days at the start of a unit to the challenge of equipping writers with strategies for generating writing. In this unit, especially, you can progress past introducing yet more strategies quickly.

The next most important thing to do will be to look at the writing that your children produce. Look at their entries, and think back to all you taught during Unit One. Surely you will have taught children to write about focused events, to start with dialogue or a small action, to storytell rather than comment-on the event, and to write with punctuation and perhaps with paragraphs. Ask yourself, "Are children doing all this in their entries?" If not, act dumbfounded. "How can it be?" you'll need to engage your students. Suggest children get their published pieces from Unit One and lay it beside them as they write entries. "Your published piece should remind you of what you can do as a writer," you'll want to say.

As always, before the child writes a draft, the child will want to spend two or three days working in the writer's notebook to plan for that first-draft writing. Before working on timelines and leads, you may want to invite your writers to spend a bit of time studying a touchstone text or two. Be sure that the touchstone text you choose to study is not the same text that wove its way through your children's narrative unit last year. Ideally, you and your writers will study a personal narrative—but you may choose instead a fictional story, explaining that although the text is actually *fiction* and not a *personal narrative*, it can still demonstrate narrative craft. As mentioned earlier, I recommend the narrative

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about a red sweater embedded in “Eleven,” by Sandra Cisneros. I also recommend selected pages from Jean Little’s memoir *Little by Little*, from Patricia MacLachlan’s *Journey*, and from Gary Soto’s *A Summer Life*. Amy Ehrlich’s anthologies, including *When I Was Your Age: Original Stories About Growing Up*, are other wonderful resources. Some picture books can be useful in this unit, including: Yolen’s *Owl Moon*, Brinkloe’s *Fireflies!*, or English’s *Hot Day on Abbott Avenue*. Excerpts from *The House on Mango Street* (Cisneros) are also helpful.

If you decide to rally children to look closely at the ways in which writers create texts that resemble those they hope to write, you will probably want to first invite children to simply read (or listen to) the texts, allowing those texts affect them. Then, afterwards, they can pause and ask, “What has this writer done that has affected me?” You will want to guide children to notice some of the most important features of the touchstone text, and this will include asking them to notice the structure of the text. (Obviously, you’ll want to select texts as touchstones which are structured like those you hope your children write.) If your children are fairly skilled with narrative writing, you may want to teach them that narratives need not stay within the confines of a half-hour episode. Narratives actually comprise several scenes glued together with bits of exposition (or narration) between them. For children who are ready to learn this, then, we can point out that in any short story, writers often put together two or three scenes (or small moments) one after another. This is what many people mean when they say that a story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. For example, the child who has written a Small Moment vignette about getting a bike for her birthday will construct a better story if she sets up the incident by first telling about an earlier time when she begged for the bike, then jumps to the moment she got her bike, and ends with a description of riding away on the bike. Similarly, the child who writes about defending the goal in a soccer game will construct a more effective story if he first backs up to re-create the moment when he put on his goalie pads and worried they might not be thick enough.

Rehearsing for Writing: “What Do I really Want to Say?”

Whether children are writing one episode or linking several together, we will want to teach them that writers focus their pieces not only by narrowing the time-frame in which they write but also by deciding on the angle from which to tell a story. Children will have already learned to draft and revise timelines, so you’ll want to remind writers that the strategies they learned earlier in the year are tools to use over and over throughout one’s life. But the decisions over what to include and what to bypass, what to stress and what to skip should ideally be made in an effort to forward the writer’s message. The question, “How do I start my story?” really can’t be answered, save in tandem, with the question, “What is it I really want my reader to know and to feel?”

Therefore you will want to teach children that writers prepare for writing not only by making timelines, but also by asking ourselves, “What am I trying to show about myself through this story? What do I want readers to know about me? How can I bring that

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meaning out in this episode?” As part of this, children need to learn that the same story can be told differently, depending on the theme the writer wants to bring out. An episode about falling from the monkey bars could be written to show that the writer was afraid but conquered her fears, or from another perspective to show that peer pressure goaded the writer to take reckless risks.

Storytelling can be another way to rehearse for writing, and of course it is important to raise the level of children’s storytelling. You may want to teach children to plan a story with a beginning, a middle and an end, and before they tell the story, to think, “What do I want my listener to feel?” You could also teach children that story-tellers stretch out the good parts, trying to be sure those parts really capture the listener. Before children draft, they also need to write a variety of leads, working to explore where in the sequence of events the story will begin and trying to start the story with a small action, dialogue or with the setting. You’ll probably want them to study effective leads. The lead to *Fireflies!* (Brinckloe), for example, is worth studying.

Drafting and Revising

You will need to decide whether children write their drafts in story booklets or on regular notebook paper. The booklets may help your strugglers. Either way, they’ll “make movies in the mind” and draft quickly. Once students have drafted, it will be important to remind them that every writer revises their work and to encourage them to draw on all they already know about revision. Students will have learned earlier that writers reread and ask, “Where is the heart of my story?” and they stretch that part of the story out, writing it with more detail and enthusiasm. They will also have learned that a writer can make a special point to not only tell the external but also the internal story. Remind them that the strategies they learned earlier in the year need to be drawn upon again and again. That is—explicitly teach transference!

In addition, in this unit you may want to teach children that a writer’s revisions are always informed by our sense of how stories tend to go. This, then, could become your entrée into teaching students that stories are not, in fact, chains of equally-developed micro-events (as illustrated by a timeline), but rather that stories include problems and solutions, and are characterized by rising action, increasing tension. Of course, when children develop the heart of a story as they did in the previous unit, what they really do is turn a *timeline* into a *story mountain*. The latter is the graphic organizer that you may want to spotlight as a tool for revision in this unit. Once you’ve helped a child realize that it can help to think of one’s personal narrative as a story, it is not hard to teach that youngster that the beginning and ending of his or her story needs to relate to the pinnacle of the story. That is, if a child writes about the day she wins a big swim race, she may want to set up this vignette by telling a moment which shows that all her life she longed to be a competitive swimmer, and then progressing to the last moment. As a result, children learn significant ways to craft effective stories, and this knowledge will be important as they continue to grow as writers.

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You'll probably also want to help children learn that writers get ideas for revision by rereading touchstone texts as insiders, noticing sections that particularly affect them and then examining the text closely in order to think, "What has the author done to create this effect?" You might say that their stories remind you of those written by a published author. "Many of you are writing a whole lot like so and so," you could say, referring to an author and a text that the children met earlier in the unit. "I wondered if maybe, as a class, we could study what she did, and see if there are techniques she's used that we could borrow in our writing."

In the end, your children also need to ask, "What effect do I want to create in my text and how could I create it?" After all, the real goal is to improve the quality of the writing—and of the writers—in general. Your deeper lesson throughout the unit will be this: Writers never stop learning how to write better. It is not enough to learn that an author uses dialogue and then, *presto*, children add dialogue to their drafts, checking that item off as done. Writers are constantly engaged in the long-term continual study of good writing.

When you finish this unit, you'll publish children's work. Before progressing to the next unit, devote one day to an on-demand writing assignment. Give your children the very same directions which you gave at the start of the year, only this time let them know you want to see what they have learned from two months studying narrative writing. Then, once again, be sure to insist they work with independence.

After children have written their pieces, you'll want to see where each child now stands on the narrative continuum. Has the child progressed from the start of the year? Show each child what you see. Naming their progress is a critical form of teaching.

Unit 3 – The Personal Essay

November

This unit of study invites students into the difficult and exhilarating work of learning to write well within an expository structure. At the start of this unit you will probably want to point out to writers that they could conceivably write about a topic (say a visit to Grandma's) as a narrative, retelling it either chronologically or as a non-narrative piece, also referred to as an essay. If the case of the latter, writers will need to advance a certain idea about their topic (e.g. "Visits to Grandma's farm feel like time travel."). For some students, the fact that they can write about personal topics in a genre other than a personal narrative will be a new realization. That is, you will teach children that the terms *narrative* and *non-narrative* (or *essay*) refer to structure and genre, not to content. In this unit, each child will write a personal essay in which she advances a theme of personal significance, arguing, for example, "It's hard being an only child," or claiming, "My dog is my best friend."

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Before progressing into this unit, you—the teacher—need to make some decisions. Above all, you need to envision the unit, realizing that you have choices. One crucial decision you'll need to make is this: How many essays do you expect your children will write within this unit? That is, will you teach this unit as you might teach a unit on poetry, with children writing lots and lots of quick essays and then choosing a few to revise? Or will you teach this more like you taught the last unit, taking children in a step-by-step fashion through the process of writing this genre? This write-up elaborates on the latter option, but if you'd prefer the former, draw on this write-up and Writing to Make a Difference to create a workable plan.

This write-up describes how you can provide lots of scaffolding and support in order to help children experience the process of writing effective essays. There are many reasons to take one's time, harvesting all the learning opportunities found along the way. If you help children write rough drafts and do lots of revision with the goal of learning as much as possible about logical thought, this unit can have enormous payoffs. Then, after helping kids spend a month writing one essay, you can show students they also have the option of churning out a quick essay in a day—or even in fifteen minutes!

Although we're proposing that you invest several weeks in helping children write essays, we nevertheless believe that even after providing this amount of time and teaching, you'll need to reduce some of the complexity of finished essays and highlight the most essential moves an essayist must make. In a future unit of study, you can show students how to write essays more quickly, on the run.

Strategies for Generating and Elaborating upon Essay Writing

As with any unit of study in a writing workshop, it is important to begin by helping children develop a repertoire of strategies for collecting entries—this time, essay entries.

Teach students that their lives are provocative. Writers observe things in the world, recording what we see, and then we let what we see spark new thoughts in us. We write, “The thought I have about this is. . .” or “This makes me realize. . .” And we write to capture our thoughts. Children will profit from learning to free-write in writers’ notebooks. When children learn to write at length without a preconceived content, they learn to trust that ideas will surface as they go along.

During this early phase of the unit, you may also want to teach children that they can not only write “off” from what they see, but that they can also revisit topics and times that matter in their lives. One way to do this is to reread entries they collected earlier in the year, using the entries as starting points. They might, for example, write, “The idea I have about this is. . .” or “The thing that surprises me about this is. . .” A child might jot down a topic that he cares about, then collect ideas about that big subject and write at length about one of those ideas.

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Of course, if you teach a particular strategy for generating essay entries, this doesn't mean the entire class needs to use the strategy you have just taught! Children by now should be accustomed to selecting the strategy that works best on any given occasion. That is, the strategy you introduce in a minilesson on a particular day is not that day's assignment but is, instead, one of many in a growing repertoire of strategies that writers can draw upon as needed.

You and your children can think of your own wonderful ways to collect provocative ideas. Perhaps your children will decide to read a novel for a few minutes, close the book and write, "The thought I have about this is...." A child might jot down topics, hobbies, or issues that he or she cares about, then collect ideas about that big subject and write off one of them.

In the narrative units of study, you no doubt found that students' writing becomes vastly stronger if you taught focus and detail. Similarly, in this unit, you'll want to put your finger on particularly essential qualities of good writing. The first to emphasize is elaboration. When children are writing about their own ideas, in order to *say more*, they need to *think more*. Teaching them to live in the world of ideas is no small accomplishment. If a child has written an idea or a claim, teach that child to say more. If he wrote, "My mother is good to me," encourage him not to slip immediately towards telling examples (which brings him to the land of narrative writing), but instead to try even rephrasing the initial idea. Phrases such as "That is" or "In other words" help. Now the child may end up writing: "My mother is good to me. That is, my mother is my best friend. In other words, I can't imagine living without my mother."

Many children will find it helps to use thought-prompts to prime the pump of their ideas. "The surprising thing about this is..." an essayist might write in her notebook before spinning out a brand new thought in letters that scrawl down the page. That is, once a child records an idea, the child will benefit from having strategies to elaborate upon that idea. Using prompts such as, "to add on . . .," or "furthermore . . .," allows children to extend their first ideas and to use writing as a way of thinking.

Teach Writers to Choose a Seed Idea, to Write it as a Thesis, and to Build the Structure for the Essay

After collecting provocative, thoughtful entries, young essayists will reread their entries (as before) and select one idea. In the earlier, narrative units of study, however, children actually selected a seed *story*; this time they will indeed select a seed *idea*. The idea may be a sentence or two – it will not be longer.

Once students have selected and articulated an idea ("The Dominican Republic feels like home to me," for example), you will want to teach them to elaborate on that idea by generating subordinate ideas ("The Dominican Republic feels like home because my

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childhood memories are there,” and “The Dominican Republic feels like home because my extended family is there,” and so forth). The easiest way to support most claims is to provide a few parallel *reasons* for that claim; writers can restate the claim over and over, each time adding the transitional word *because* followed by a reason. In the end, we hope each child has a main idea (a claim or a thesis) and several parallel supporting ideas. Teachers sometimes refer to the main idea and supporting statements as “boxes and bullets.”

There are other ways to support a claim (or thesis), and a teacher may or may not teach those alternatives. Usually children write support ideas through a series of parallel statements. In the end, these get consolidated into a single statement. The thesis, “It’s hard being an only child,” becomes “It’s hard being an only child because your parents shower you with too much attention, your parents have too many of their hopes attached to you, and because you can be very lonely.” We have found it helps if children take the stem of the thesis and record it on the outside of a folder, then make smaller internal folders for each of their bullets (topic sentences). That is, on the outside folder the child might write, “It’s hard being an only child....” Then on one of his inside folders he would write, “Because you can be very lonely.” You may decide upon a different way to help children collect and sort entries that support the frame of their essays.

Gathering Material for an Essay, then Selecting the most Compelling and Appropriate Material and Constructing a Draft

When it is time to teach children to collect materials to support their topic sentences, you will probably want to teach them that they can first collect stories that illustrate their ideas. It is also important to teach children to angle these stories so that they support the idea the writer wants to advance and that they may learn to “unpack” those stories, just as a teacher debriefs after a demonstration in a minilesson. In one given day, you teach students that writers sometimes collect angled stories. That very day, you expect children to have lots of opportunities to practice this technique and become proficient at it, because during that one day’s writing workshop they should be able to collect at least one angled story within each of their folders. (They may revise these in order to bring out the point they want to make.) That is, during one day of a writing workshop, a child should be expected to collect three or four angled stories, filing these in the appropriate folder. It would not be a day’s work for a child to write one tiny anecdote in a day!

Writers can also collect lists to support their topic sentences. Many teachers use Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech as a model text for these lists. Additionally, you might show children how statistics, observations, citations, quotations, and so forth can enrich their work. Children not only can employ strategies they learned from past experiences writing essays, but they can also develop strategies of their own. It is important to make a big deal out of a student who “invents” a new way to gather ideas. If these bits are not collected in a writer’s notebook but on separate bits of paper, they can be filed in the appropriate topic-sentence folders.

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Before a child can write a draft, he or she will need to select only the very most *compelling* evidence from all the material the child collected. He or she will also need to scrutinize the material in order to be sure it closely supports their claim. Teach them to look carefully from the claim to the evidence (the topic sentence) and back again, because often the two aren't as congruent as they appear at first glance.

Once writers have selected the most powerful and pertinent support material for each of their topic sentences, they staple, tape or recopy this information into a paragraph or two that supports each topic sentence. In this manner they construct the rough draft of an essay. Special lessons on transitions, introductions, and conclusions are important here.

Unit 4 – Writing with Independence: Preparing for the Writing Tasks of the State Test (ELA Exam): The Extended Response Essays

*December/
Early
January*

Thinking about the Unit and Learning from the Tests and Rubrics

One thing that state tests across the nation have taught us is that the tests demand writers who are flexible and resilient. These young writers need to be able to write on demand about subjects with which they may not be familiar. They need to be able to do this using text support from texts that may be inaccessible, to support an idea constructed in response to a prompt. They need to write with clear structure, with some sense of voice and style, and they need to use helpful and visible transitions in their writing. Finally, their vocabulary needs to be sophisticated and literary. That is what is on the rubric. To prepare students to write for the state test, we need to prepare them to write for the rubric.

The rubric emphasizes four elements: *structure*, which is most clearly evident by a thesis and supporting evidence in clearly indented paragraphs, with an introduction that restates the prompt and a conclusion that states what has been argued and perhaps offers an additional insight; *text support*, which is clearly shown by quoting or paraphrasing the text or texts that are given; *craft*, which is clearly shown by transitions, long and short sentence structure, control of conventions, and literary vocabulary; and *insight*, which is shown most easily by making connections outside of or beyond the text, but that are clearly related to the text.

It's tempting, but not that effective, to keep studying last year's tests – then we keep preparing students for last year's test. If, for example, last year's fourth grade had to write about two stories, we then prepare this year's students to write about two stories. However, then this year they may very well be given a story and an article. One year their prompt may be highly literal, not requiring much work to make it into a thesis. The next year, the prompt may require students to take a position in order to create a thesis. One year, eighth grade had to write on a story and an article, and the same was true of the next year, and so we might prepare them only for those genres. But when the test arrives, the

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eighth graders have to write about a story and a poem. The next year it may be an article and a poem! It's better, then, to study the common tasks of the test and the skills they require, and then to look at the rubric, which remains the same across all of these tasks.

Clearly, what we need is to prepare students in 4th, 6th, and 8th grade, in New York, for two main kinds of writing tasks. They have to listen to a story or article and write in response to it, and they have to read two texts and write a response. It will be good if they are ready to write about any combination of two texts. So, students who have written about poems, about stories, and about articles, will be prepared to write about these texts. We can look in the curriculum for other places, then, where students may practice this kind of writing.

When we look at the rubric, it is clear that students who have spent a lot of time writing, who are comfortable backing up their ideas with evidence, who can mine texts for text support, who understand essay structure, who can draft and revise on the run, and who control appropriate conventions so their writing is lucid and persuasive, will be fine. Fortunately, this is work that we prepare them to do over the year and years of writing workshop. It does emphasize why we need students to be writing every day on topics they care about. In addition to fluency, they need to have already internalized a strong voice, sense of personal style, and expectation that they will try to be insightful. It's too hard for students to develop a sense of voice and style when writing to prompts, and yet they cannot get the highest scores without this sense of voice, style, and insight. They also need to be comfortable applying their knowledge of structure and craft to any genre and prompt they are given.

This means that, going into this unit, students need to have written essays. If they wrote their first essay this year, and they spent several weeks on one essay, then it's critical to follow that by coaching them to use what they know to write an essay in a few days. Then, follow that up with some on-demand essays that take one period to write and one to revise, which will help students keep applying what they know with greater automaticity *and* still give them opportunities to improve their essay writing through some coached revision. More and more, as you move through these steps, you want to see that common revision such as transitions and literary language begins to show up in the drafts and on-demand pieces.

Word Work

Because literary vocabulary continues to challenge many emergent readers and writers, begin word walls and word work early. In reading, we described word walls containing lists of words describing characters, such as words for *sad*, *happy*, *brave*, etc. Under *sad*, we might have a list that goes from *glum* and *gloomy* to *despondent* and *desolate*. As such, the list moves from words that are just a little sad, to words that are VERY sad. We are not going to teach dictionary definitions for these words, but instead are going to use them in read aloud, partner talk, post-its, and writing about reading. Writing for the test,

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is, of course, writing about reading. When students first begin writing about texts, they may be noticing characters' moods and emotions, or their traits. Push them to revise this writing using words from the word wall.

A second word wall that is useful for students is a word wall that describes texts, in categories such as *interesting, sad, inspiring, helpful, and moving*. Underneath these categories, there can be words such as *fascinating, gloomy, inspirational, informative, provocative*, etc. Use these words in conversation about the texts you read in class – is it informative? Is it instructive? Is it provocative? Is it predictable? Is it surprising? Get these words up.

Finally, when students write essays, a chart of transition words and phrases really helps them to elevate the tone and clarify the structure of their essays. *First, next, finally, as well, similarly, on the other hand, nevertheless, therefore, as one can see, it is clear, it becomes evident, surprisingly, remarkably, in a similar story, this idea becomes clear*, etc. are examples of these kinds of transitions and sentence starters.

This work has to start early. If students begin it only in the weeks before the test, they tend to sprinkle these words willy-nilly, to overload or to repeat, and to misspell. This 'use and confuse' stage, while endearing and appropriate to their development, does not help their presentation for the test – we need to move them slowly into some mastery, which is best done if they do this kind of word work all year long.

Getting Ready

Our goal is to teach students to use what they know about writing essays, and using text evidence, to write clearly structured response essays. They need clear introductions and transitions, clear text evidence to support their thesis, and a conclusion that makes a small insight or comparison, or at least restates the thesis and claims to have proven it. Their handwriting has to be neat, the essay should get onto the second page, and their paragraphs need to be clearly indented. They need to stay focused on the task and not wander into interesting but not relevant topics. Their job is to answer the question and to support the answer with evidence from the text. This is doable, as it builds on prior teaching.

In all of this writing, students need to work swiftly and purposefully, planning what they will say in their head or quickly on paper, and then drafting, using what they know about non-narrative writing to state a clear idea and back it up convincingly with evidence. They have time to jot a quick "boxes and bullets" draft plan that includes the thesis and the evidence they'll use, but that's all they have time for. Then they need to write, revising in their head as they go, striving for accurate spelling, looking back over their conventions for accuracy, using details from the text when possible.

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Moving Into Response Essays: Having Ideas About Texts and Backing Them Up with Evidence

The first thing you need to teach students is that when readers have ideas about texts, they back them up with evidence from the text. To launch this work, teach children to talk and write about ideas they develop about your read alouds and the chapter books they are reading. This will not be new thinking for your students; you are just asking them to do it formally in quick writing—to write down their ideas in actual essay form with a thesis and two or three supports. Go with two supports to get them started if you want, as there's no learning benefit from using three supports when they are learning to write with structure, transitions, and text evidence. Also, don't make a huge deal out of this, if it's really hard, and don't introduce fancy draft plans and templates, none of which they will get on the test. This year, we learned that even our struggling readers and writers could collaboratively talk through ideas for an essay on an easy, familiar read aloud, and get started on this essay. Then we could teach them how to revise it for paragraphs, transitions, and literary language. This was so much easier than assuming they had to start from scratch. Also, it meant that by day one, kids had a draft going, and by day two, they revised and finished it and could start another. They need to draft, revise, and do it again. They can't spend weeks on a draft when they will have 50 minutes to write their essay on the test.

This part of your teaching, then, shows them how to state an idea and go back to the text for evidence to support it, as well as how to do this writing work swiftly and with a minimum of fuss because they already know about thesis-based, non-narrative writing structure from unit three. For revision, teach them to use transitions, paragraphs and perhaps some literary vocabulary. Don't rewrite the essays, just add these things in. Do small group work for those who need support gathering text evidence. Thus, they write an essay on one day, revise it on the next. Try one essay on a story. Try one essay on an article. Perhaps try one essay on a poem. Use familiar texts from read aloud, so that you can teach students how to be successful at this work—they have to get this structure totally down, and they need to internalize the habits of writing in paragraph structure, of restating the thesis, of quoting or paraphrasing the text. You'll only move them to harder texts when they have the structure down. Again and again, we see students dropping their structure when the text gets hard. This structure has to become something that is inside their bones, which they get by writing and revising and going through the process again, with success.

By the end of the first week, children should be writing quick, small, persuasive pieces that state an idea about a text and elaborate on that idea with evidence from the text they are reading. (This will also provide extra reinforcement of the kind of thinking children will need to do to answer the multiple choice questions on the ELA. It will also help them prepare them for the short responses of the ELA, where they listen to a narrative and then answer questions, often ones about character's behaviors, feelings, motivations and accomplishments.) By the end of the week they should expect to write in paragraphs that

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are clearly indented. Instruct students who have messy or small handwriting to skip a line between paragraphs. They should expect to create a thesis from the prompt and prove it by quoting or paraphrasing the text.

The following week, as the next revision you'll want to teach the children is how to extend their introductions. In their introduction they can, besides stating the thesis, mention the genre of the text and the author. "In this short story, *Oliver Button is a Sissy*, by Tomie dePaola, Oliver Button is a role model." They can also revise for literary language. "In this remarkable short story...Oliver Button is a surprising role model" Then show them how to plan for the evidence they will use, and to mention this evidence in the introduction, such as, "For instance, Oliver Button is a role model because he knows he can be different. He is also a role model because he puts up with bullying and stays strong. Finally, he is a role model because he follows his dream." You may have the students go back to the essays they wrote the week before and write introductions for them that are three to four sentences.

Then show the children what can go in the conclusion. The conclusion, for very emergent writers, is merely a restating of the thesis. They can add to this basic conclusion by stating what they have proven the thesis, as in: "Thus, it's clear that Oliver Button is a good role model." It's not that hard for emergent writers, in the conclusion, to state something they liked about the text or that they learned from the text: "I'd like to be like Oliver Button." Another possibility for the conclusion is to teach students that it is an appropriate place to make a connection outside the text. Three possibilities are to connect this text to another text, to connect it to the world or a social issue, or to connect it to the writer. These would sound like, "This story reminds me of *Dancing in the Wings* because..." or "Bullying is an important issue in school. Many kids suffer from it. Oliver shows us that we can just keep going and it might get better," or "I wish I could be as strong as Oliver Button. He also makes me think about how to help other kids when they get bullied."

You may have your students go back to the same essays and write conclusions for them with what they have learned. By the end of the week, try a fresh on-demand essay on a familiar text, with a chart up in the room reminding them of the structures and transitions they have learned. Have them revise it on the second day. Do small group work as needed for text evidence, for intros and conclusions, for transitions. The transitions are listed above – these are crucial, do large and small group work around them and have them up all the time until the test.

The third week you will want to work on two things. First, make sure students elaborate their supporting paragraphs by starting with a transition phrase. They should clearly state the evidence they are giving, quoting or paraphrasing the text. Show them how to end the paragraph by going back to the thesis. Secondly, show them how to write about two texts at the same time. Make it easy to start by using familiar texts where the connection is

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obvious. So, for instance, read the story about Oliver Button being bullied and an article about standing up to bullies. Use the kinds of prompts that arise on the state test, such as, “If Oliver Button was to read this article...” or “Explain how to stand up to bullies. Use evidence from the story and the article...” By the end of the week, it would be good if students had written an essay about two texts in one period and revised it in a second period. One of the texts should be one they already wrote about when they did an essay on just one text.

If you have five weeks, you can repeat this third week, writing another two essays and then perhaps publishing one essay from the past two weeks. If you have four weeks, move ahead to what’s listed below for week four. Watch your timing – if you stay too long on one essay, there won’t be time to teach students how to write across two essays. The kids need to write and revise, write and revise. They need charts of transition phrases and sentence starters, and charts of vocabulary commonly used in these kinds of essays. They need to write. They need to be successful. They should be proud of themselves as they do this. They should have the tasks down pat; they should know they’re good at this. The only unpredictable challenge they’ll face on the test will be the difficulty of the texts, because the rest of the challenges are ones you’ll have prepared them for. Try to solve problems with small group work, not large group instruction—too often we slow down a whole class because some students are struggling with something.

Differentiated instruction is the key! Take small groups in grammar. Figure out who needs to write in simple sentences and who can make a sentence with a list separated by commas in their introduction. Take small groups in craft and structure. Figure out who needs basic transition words and who is ready for some of the more sophisticated ones. Figure out who needs a two sentence introduction and who can write five sentences. Pay attention to who wanders and gets off task and teach them NOT to make connections but to stay totally centered in the text.

This leaves you one week, at least, to teach students to try to incorporate their revisions earlier in their drafting process. You will also need to show them how to fulfill the task when the prompt is a little vague and/or the texts are a little harder. Show them some of the texts and prompts from prior years. Have them do a “boxes and bullets” outline, with a partner or in a small group for more struggling readers, and have them underline the parts of the text they may use. Practice writing an introduction for one of these essays. In small groups, show them how to quote the text, even if they’re not sure they understand the whole text. Show them how to use some details from the text, by underlining some of the texts as they read or using notes if they kept them during the read aloud. Work on the first and last sentences of their paragraphs, so they go from “for example...” to “this shows...” Take down the charts and have them practice, with a partner if needed, revising their essays when the charts are not up. Then praise them, tell them to get some sleep, pat everyone—including yourself—on the back, and take the test. On the day of

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the test, don't wish them "good luck." Tell them, "Do your best, you know how to do this."

Note-taking for the Listening Response

One of the things that has stimulated much debate has been whether kids should take notes on the listening response. It's pretty clear that struggling readers often stop listening to the text as they try to write stuff down. Moreover, in comparing their note pages to their essays, often little to nothing of what is in their notes turns up in their response. In the reading curriculum calendar, we outline a curriculum of read aloud that gets students ready to listen for commonly asked elements of the text. You should, at the very least, practice teaching students to listen well, and see who benefits from taking notes. There will always be some fluent readers and writers who take good notes, use them, and all is well. There will always be some for whom note-taking is getting in the way. For a student of any age, for instance, who reads and writes at a third grade level, it's doubtful whether taking notes is going to be beneficial.

Therefore, you have two choices. You can offer differentiated instruction and coaching based on your assessment and your students' self assessments of their reading and writing, so that some students may take (some) notes while others don't. Or, figure out a system that benefits most of your students and hope for the best. Last year several TC classrooms emphasized listening rather than taking notes, and many students seemed much more prepared to write well, because they only have to remember the text for about 20 minutes. Some classrooms tried a system of jotting only the big "who" and "what" the first time, and some details or sequence of events the second time. Again, students who write quickly and can listen and write at the same time seemed to do well with this system, and struggling students struggled to listen, write, and comprehend. Note-taking doesn't raise the level of a students' reading comprehension. So you may want to assess and help students plan manageable goals so they do as well as possible.

If There's Trouble, Get Ready Early

If some of your students are having trouble backing up ideas about texts, take them back to a story they have understood, and return to familiar ideas. You'll want to notice this, if possible, when kids are doing post-its and small writing about texts. It will be late if you're noticing it for the first time during test prep. If you notice it early, then you may carefully plan your read alouds to model what readers are noticing and thinking about as they read, and then introduce stop-and-jot, turn-and-talk, and think aloud prompts that lead children to the kinds of inference and interpretation work that will set them up to write ideas supported with evidence. You may say something like, "I notice that the little girl in *Stray* seems to really want a dog but she can't tell her parents why. Stop and jot about what you think she's feeling and why..."

Next, in writing workshop, have your students take an idea that they thought was worth exploring. For example, the idea might be: "In *Stray*, Doris is lonely." They should start

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to write entries in their notebooks about what they were thinking and why it is important. They may start with the simple format of “I notice...” and “I think...” as in: “I notice Doris wants a dog,” and “I think that she is really lonely in her home.” You can then teach them to write brief summaries of the parts of the story that go with their idea, such as: “I notice Doris doesn’t have anyone to talk to and she seems lonely. For example, in the story she can’t explain to her parents why she wants the dog; she just brings it in the house. She doesn’t seem used to explaining her feelings.” Then you may teach them to write their thoughts about why characters do the things they do, *based on the story* as in: “Doris probably hopes the dog will be a friend for her. That’s probably why she calls him in from the snow. In other parts of the story, she seems really lonely. She cries herself to sleep, she sits alone in a chair, and she never says what she wants. She needs a friend. The dog seems alone, too, so he’d be a good friend to Doris.”

If you notice it late, work with easy stories and get these students used to writing down ideas and evidence in full sentences. Go with just two pieces of evidence—three will probably be too much. Go with simple ideas. Work on structure, and move from writing it all in one paragraph, to having an introduction even if it is one sentence, and then two supporting paragraphs even if they are short. Then show them how to say, after they give an example from the text, “This shows....”

Answering Free Response Questions

In this brief, one week seminar, you may teach your students to apply what they already know about making and supporting claims to the challenge of writing short responses to questions such as those they’ll find on the ELA test. Students can return to the collection of short texts they used when preparing for the ELA, and use these to answer short response questions. For example, students might be asked to write a response to the question, “Why did Poppleton spray Cherry Sue with the hose?” Teach students to answer the question with a claim, and then show them that they need to find evidence in the text to support their claim. Teach them to recall parts of the text in sequence, as this is also good practice for the ELA.

You may also want to teach students about rereading their answers using a series of lenses. For example, you might teach students to reread by thinking about whether or not the evidence they’ve chosen actually matches their claim. You may also teach them to reread using the eyes of an editor. You may teach them to do this by having them asking themselves, “Are my ideas expressed in sentences that are clear and easy for my reader to follow? Can I check the spelling of particular words by checking another part of the text where that word is in print?” Spend time reminding students to reread their writing so that they can develop these habits for the test.

Editing

The fifth grade ELA test includes a small section that assesses students’ editing ability by providing them with a short text that they will need to proofread. To support students

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with this task, you may want to create a writing seminar that begins by teaching them to edit their own writing using the lens of one grammatical convention at a time, so that they first reread their writing with the lens of capitalization for instance, and then of verb tense and then of subject-verb agreement and then of eliminating fragments and writing complete sentences and then of using commas in lists. These conventions will be assessed on the ELA. After they have learned to read their own pieces with these lenses, you can teach them to do the same work with a piece of writing that is not theirs. You may want to begin by limiting the variety of errors in a text so that students become tuned in to the types of problems they might encounter. Then, by the end of the week, you might give them a text with a variety of editing work that they need to do. For example, you could provide students with sample paragraphs that highlight either capitalization errors or misuse of commas and ask them to proofread and correct the mistakes they find.

Independent Publishing

If you can muster up the energy, and you have planned ahead so you are not cramming this unit into three weeks, you may be able to institute small, informal independent publishing during this time, so that students don't collapse from the essays they are writing. Although frankly, a lot of students who had clear, focused instruction, became very proud of their essay writing during this unit. Still, they are only doing a little writing about their own ideas and the choice of text and the prompts is generally given to them. It would be lovely if they could keep up their notebooks (remember how in unit one we taught them to do narrative entries of small moments, for the rest of the year?) with some small moments, and publish any of these, either as a small moment, or, really, any genre.

We know that volume and choice in writing is necessary for our students' growth, and yet during this time of year, many of us find our students' writing notebooks languishing, unopened in their desks. You might decide that now is a good time to spend some time, here and there, teaching your students how to dream up their own writing projects. They can work on their projects when they have free time in the school day, and continue to work on at home.

Open the floor up to students' suggestions. Some teachers limit their students' project ideas to the ones the class has studied so far: personal narrative, essay, persuasive writing. Other teachers decide that students can choose from any genre, as long as mentor texts support the students' choice. You shouldn't feel as if you need to dedicate a huge amount of time to independent projects. Merely suggesting that students give it a try, giving them time to brainstorm ideas, perhaps offering them a place in the classroom to display their finished work, can be all some classes need to be inspired to keep the volume of purposeful writing up and going.

If you opted to have students begin to develop independent projects during this unit, you will find that the need for interdependence will be at an all time high. You will want to

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teach students how to be bouncing boards for each other's writing ideas. This will mean helping each other to see the positives, as well as the areas where things might need to be refined. You might also find that partners can serve as an invaluable accountability source. No one keeps a student on track quite like another student.

Unit 5 - Fiction

*Mid
January/
February*

Bringing Forward What We Already Know About Narrative Writing

After students spend a month writing essays, they'll be eager to return to the land of narrative writing, especially if they are finally, at long last, able to write what they want to most write: fiction. When you launch the work with fiction, highlight ways in which this work relies upon a process which hopefully children are internalizing as their own. For example, children should be able to tell you what a writer does early on in the process of producing new kinds of text. They should be able to say that just as essayists carried notebooks everywhere, collecting provocative entries that might spark ideas for essays, so, too, fiction writers need to carry notebooks through life, learning ways to live like fiction writers. After children begin to do this, teach them to see ideas for stories everywhere. Teach students that fiction writers get ideas for their stories by paying attention to the moments and issues of their lives. You might tell children, "When I was young, I thought fiction writers looked up into the clouds and imagined make-believe stories about castles and puppy dogs. But then I grew up and learned how real fiction writers get their ideas." Then you could tell children that Robert McCloskey got the idea for *Make Way for Ducklings* when he was stopped in Boston traffic while a line of ducks waddled across the street in front of him.

Collecting: Mining Our Lives for Story Ideas

Teach students that some fiction writers get started on their ideas for stories by thinking of settings that seem to hold a lot of stories and thinking of possible plots and characters the setting seems to inspire. A writer might think of a pizza shop near a school and imagine: Who goes to the pizza shop? Who works there? What kinds of events naturally happen at this kind of pizza shop? Other writers get intrigued by the idea of characters, and invent people who are fully fleshed out. These characters can then be mined for possible story ideas. A writer might spot a teenager on the subway giving money to a beggar. The writer then thinks of a name for that person, motivations, fears, obstacles and then imagines the possible plot lines that would be natural outgrowths of such a character.

Of course, when writing fiction, we often take the true events or issues of our lives and think, "How could that have gone differently?" Therefore, you'll want to teach children that they can take the tiny details and big issues of their lives and speculate on how they could become stories. Children might write entries in which they both recount a bit of their lives and then speculate (in writing) on how they could turn this into a story. A child

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who has recently moved could make up a story about a girl who moved, only in this story she could give that girl a companion (a dog? a sister?), and this could be the companion the writer wished she'd had.

Children can reread their notebooks as well as live their lives collecting story ideas, filling their notebooks with musings about possible stories. In these entries, your students will not actually write their stories. Instead, they will write plans for how their stories might go. Of course, you can expect that some children will misunderstand this invitation and end up collecting mere lists of totally un-developed story ideas. If your children do this, write your own entry about a story you could conceivably write, using this as a model to show them how writers flesh out an idea. In your jottings about a possible story, write a bit about your character's traits and motivations. What does your character want? Fear? Care about? Be sure you are very specific. "My character wants a cocker spaniel like the one her grandmother used to have (but it died and now she only has its blue collar). She will try to convince her Mom that she can care for a pet by being a foster mother or by pet sitting or something like that."

Developing the Seeds of Story: Storytelling, Developing Characters, Story Mountains

For a few days (or a week) then, your children will probably collect entries in which they explore ideas that could possibly become fiction stories. As they do this collecting, they will profit from trying story ideas out. A great way for them to do this is to storytell those ideas to a partner. Teach your children some techniques of storytelling. Try telling children that the beginning of their stories should sound like the beginning of a famous book or of a fairy tale. "Once, not long ago, a little girl named Cissy..." You might invite children to listen to storytellers on tape or help children practice their storytelling skills by telling each other a fairy tale they know well. If you elevate their storytelling a bit, this will help them bring a storyteller's voice—and an aura of literary language—to their own story plans. A word of caution: When children tell stories to each other, remind them that the stories need to begin and end within five minutes. It is helpful for children to become accustomed to fitting their entire story arc into a curtailed length of time.

Once your children have chosen their seed idea (which in this unit will be called their story idea) and story-told possible versions of the story many times, their instinct will be to dive right into plot. The secret to success will be that you help your children first develop their ideas. Some fiction writers begin their writing process by considering mostly their characters, others by thinking of settings, still others think of plots. Although it is true that fiction writers have as many different processes as there are different stories, we find that it is helpful to choose one path to teach the whole class. Meanwhile, you can rely on conferences and strategy lessons to support students who will need different pathways into fiction.

If your children are somewhat new to fiction writing, we encourage you to urge them first to develop the main character. The entries children write at this point will probably never

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appear in their final stories. A fiction writer once said, “Before you can begin writing your story, you need to know your characters so well that you know exactly how much change each one has in his or her pocket.” If you ask children to develop ideas about their characters' traits, they will probably immediately list external traits. (She has red hair, she has green eyes, etc.) You might want to encourage children to think also of a character's internal traits. What is she afraid of? What does she want? The trick is to help children create coherent characters with characteristics that fit together in a manner which seems believable. When children use broad generalizations (for example, suggesting the character is a good friend) ask them to open these terms up and be much more specific. If a character is a good friend, it will be important for the writer to think: What are the unique ways in which this character is a good friend?

You might find that some students will be able to go beyond simple coherence of character traits and into deeper complexities of motivation and other nuances of personality. Depending on their level of sophistication, students will also learn to consider and include details that let their readers know how the characters feel about themselves, how they look at the world of their story. Finally, be sure that students think especially about the character's wants and needs. After a few days in which writers collect entries developing their character, you will want them to think about how they could dramatize the character, putting him or her into action in a scene (which is a fiction writer's word for a small moment story).

Usually a story-line (a plot) will emerge out of the intersection of the character's motivations and the obstacles that get in his or her way. Once a writer has imagined a plotline for the story, one which takes into account the writer's knowledge of story structure and of narrative writing (see October's unit), the next challenge will be for the writer to hone in on just one or two scenes (also called small moments), which can show the character's quest or can put into motion all the character's motivations and traits. Writers need to limit their stories to probably two small moments.

Children will use story mountains to plot the timelines of each of their two small moment scenes, and these story mountains will then serve as road maps of the stories. You are apt to point out to children that each item (each dot) on the story mountain may be its own page in a story booklet. This, plus an emphasis on using skills developed in earlier units and on storytelling rather than summarizing, will make it more likely that children's tales/creations will sound and feel like stories. Since the stories are long, revision needs to begin after page one is drafted. You may want to help students incorporate qualities of good writing as they revise the early sections of their stories. Children should incorporate into their texts all that they learned during the personal narrative units of study, writing with dialogue and showing rather than summarizing their character's feelings.

They will learn that the heart of their story lies in their character's desires and struggles to fulfill those desires. Children will be encouraged to write scenes for their characters that

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have a realistic setting. They'll learn to use dialogue and small actions to draw their readers immediately into the story. Earlier, when children's dialogue threatened to swamp their story-lines, you taught them to intersperse actions with dialogue, now you might want to highlight the need to ground the entire story (not just the introduction) in a sense of place.

Crafting and Revising Stories: Crafting Leads, Sequencing the Story, Considering Endings

As your children work on drafting the story, you can teach them strategies that fiction writers rely upon to control time, to write engaging leads, to animate every scene with action and setting, to be sure that the story's outcome makes sense, to plant hints early on about the story's outcome (this is a technique for your more sophisticated writers) and to turn to admired fiction writers for inspiration.

It will be important for children to see that the story mountains build to a high point, and that their main characters make harder and harder climbs toward their goals. Children will learn, as they sequence their story, that something happens that solves their character's problem (or begins to) at the top of their mountain. And when their character reaches the bottom, both the character and the reader should be satisfied with the journey.

Oftentimes, in the first draft of a story, the character magically receives his or her fondest dream in the form of a solution that flies in out of nowhere like Superman. With your help, children can see that—as in life—the solutions writers find in fiction are generally those that we make ourselves; there are magic answers to be found and they've often been before our eyes all along.

Moving Deeper into Fiction Writing for Experienced Writers

If your students have written realistic fictions more than several times in the past, you may want to breathe new life into the unit. Some teachers do this by inviting children to write the kind of fiction story that they've been reading during the reading workshop. That is, children may take a historical fiction, mystery or fantasy. Within these units, you'd want to re-teach story-mapping and character development, for example. But if the students are writing fantasy short stories, for instance, rather than creating a fictional plot from real life experiences, then they might create a plot based on a quest instead. Or, if the children are writing historical fiction, they might set their stories in a particular historical setting.

Alternatively, you might decide that you would like to hone your students' skills in realistic fiction by teaching them more sophisticated strategies. You might, for example, introduce the idea that story mountains can have climaxes at different points along the mountain range. Some story climaxes are towards the beginning of a story, where the big moment comes and the rest of the story grapples with the outcomes. Other stories build up to the climax and then quickly wrap-up the narrative leaving little time for the reader

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to catch her breath. Still other stories do not build a linear fashion, and instead flash-back or flash-forward.

You might teach a fiction unit that is not unlike one that children have already experienced. This time, however, you might shine a spotlight on particular qualities of writing. One which resists attention, for example, involves the challenge to develop tension in a story. You can teach students to do this by helping them increase the motivation of a character and then, later, to increase the obstacles the character must overcome. You can point out that many writers use time constraints, serious consequences or internal conflicts, to turn a story into a page-turner.

Perhaps the best way to make this fiction-unit one that feels fresh involves adopting new mentor texts, including perhaps, a mentor text that showcases a craft move that the children have not delved into before. Short stories sometimes offer perfect opportunities to explore metaphor, imagery and symbolism, for example. When students learn that writers study texts by other writers, they develop an important skill.

Unit 6 - Author Your Own Nonfiction Unit of Study: Literary Essay or Writing to Make a Real World Difference

March

Authoring your own unit is a challenging and exhilarating process. It allows you to really respond to your students' needs as writers, your particular interests, and your collective passions. This is a time when your students will benefit from your expertise. If you have experience in drama and have been chomping at the bit to do a drama unit with your students, chances are it will be a great unit because you care so much about it. If you think that investigative journalism is an important force for good in the world, and that all young writers should put their hands to it, then go at it.

It's also a powerful experience for teachers to collaborate with each other on writing a unit. In general, there are some helpful structures to consider. First, in most units, students move through stages of collecting, rehearsing and drafting, revising, and getting ready to publish. That means you need to teach some strategies for finding subjects (or simply remind them of the ones they know), something about genre and structure as they draft, and some of the craft of this genre as revision. You'll also need to have an accessible mentor text that students can study if you plan to include studying an author's craft. Most importantly, you'll need to write your own piece, that you will use to demonstrate your lessons on.

It's often helpful to think about whether students will write several quick drafts and then revise one, whether they will publish many pieces in quick drafts and revisions, or whether they will spend the unit crafting one text. Then think carefully about how this work will benefit them as writers (what muscles do you want them to develop, which

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ones they should be flexing, etc.). You want them to emerge from this unit with not only a product that you and they are proud of, but as stronger writers.

We will support you in thinking about authoring the units of study described below (you can be sure we will involve some of you in helping to imagine how these might conceivably go!). But of course, you may fashion other units of study that we have yet to imagine. The options below include: writing to make a difference, drama, and journalism.

One Option: Literary Essay

Of all the choices featured in this blurb, only this choice relies upon a publication. See Literary Essays (in Units of Study, Heinemann). In personal essays, many children will have written about lessons they learned from people they know and interact with. But writing also helps us learn from the characters in the books we read. Just as writing allows us to pause in the hurry of our lives, to really notice and experience and reflect on our lives, so, too, writing can give us a tool to pause in our hurried reading and to really pay attention to the characters and ideas in our books.

In order for children to write about reading in this way, they need to be reading! This unit, then, must include a bit of time for reading, as well as for writing. It will be easiest for children to write literary essays about a short text, either a short story or a picture book. Note that certain children's reading lives cannot simply revolve around short texts or they won't have opportunities to do as much reading as they need. Therefore, we suggest you include time for reading short texts within your writing workshop. Children in grades four and five will probably read and study from small packets of short texts that merit close study. You might thread one short story through many minilessons, showing children how you read, think, and write about that one story, and then suggest that children try similar techniques with a story from their packet. Obviously, the stories a child has in his or her packet need to be ones the child can read. We encourage you to provide stories that are rich, complex, and well-crafted enough that they reward close study.

On each of the first few days of the unit, you may decide to demonstrate a way of reading and writing off of a story, and then inviting children to draw from this repertoire of strategies as they work with any text they choose from their packets. You could remind children that just as essayists pay attention to our lives, expecting to grow ideas from this wide-awake attentiveness, so, too, literary essayists pay attention to texts. At first, children may roam about reading from the collection of texts you give them, but within a few days you will want each child to choose a story that especially speaks to that child, and then to collect entries just about that story. The process of choosing a seed idea in this unit, then, becomes double-pronged. First, a child chooses a story. Then, the child lives with that one story and gathers entries about it. Eventually, the child will also reread those entries to choose a seed idea – a claim – about that story.

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You can remind children of their work in the personal essay unit, when they observed their lives and created “thought patches” in their notebooks by writing, “The thought I have about this is...” or “This makes me realize that...” In this unit, they can pause as they read to observe what is happening to a character and then grow an idea using the same sentence starters. You can teach children that these “thought patches” can be extended, and that they can use “thought prompts” to grow their thinking. Be aware that children are apt to try to extend their thinking by providing examples only, and you will want to help them to linger with these ideas, too. Teach them to record an idea using new words by saying, “That is...” or “In other words...” and then rephrasing the idea. Teach them to entertain possibilities by writing, “Could it be that...” or “Perhaps...” or “Some may say that...” Phrases such as “Furthermore...” or “This connects with...” or “On the other hand,” or “But you might ask...” or “This is true because...” or “I am realizing that...” can also keep children elaborating upon their ideas. If you hope that children will write literary essays in which they articulate the lessons they believe a character learns in a story or essays that name the theme or idea a text teaches, then it will be important for you to provide children with strategies for growing these sorts of ideas in particular.

After children have collected responses-to-reading in their writers’ notebooks for at least a week, remind them that they already know how to reread a notebook in order to find seed ideas. In the personal essay unit, students will have literally found seed *ideas*, and they’ll need to do something similar to that exercise now. You can encourage students to search for a portion of an entry that tells the heart of the story into a single sentence or two. You can ask them to look for a seed idea that is central to the story and provocative. You can also help children generate possible seed ideas. Some children will benefit from writing inside this general structure: This is a story about.....who (has this trait/wants/cares about/)....but then (what happens to change things?)... and s/he ends up (how?). That is, some students will find success if they try writing a sentence or two in which they lay out what the character was like at the start of the story, what happened to make things change, and how this was resolved at the end. “*Winn Dixie* is the story of a lonely girl, Opal, who befriends a stray dog, Winn Dixie. The dog helps Opal make friends with lots of people.” “‘Spaghetti’ is the story of a lonely boy, Gabriel, who learns from a tiny stray kitten to open himself to love.”

You will need to help each child revise his or her “seed idea” so that it is a clear thesis, making sure it is a claim or an idea, not a fact or a question. Help children imagine how they can support the thesis in a few paragraphs. Usually for children in grades 4-5, the first support paragraph(s) will show how the child’s claim was true at the start of the story. And the next support paragraph(s) will show that it was true later in the story as well. It may be that the first support paragraph shows how the claim was true for one reason, the next, for a second reason.

Once a child has planned his or her “boxes and bullets” for a literary essay, the child will need to collect the information and insights needed to build the case. You can

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decide whether you'll encourage each child to make a file for each topic sentence (and each support paragraph). For example, if the child's claim is, "Cynthia Rylant's story, 'Spaghetti' is the story of a lonely boy who learns from a tiny stray kitten to open himself to love," the child might title one file, "Gabriel is a lonely boy" and another, "Gabriel learns from a tiny stray kitten to open himself to love." Each of these files eventually will become a paragraph (or larger) in the final essay.

On the other hand, children could bypass the process of gathering information into files, instead using rough forms of outlines to plan the content of a paragraph, then writing one support paragraph on one page, and the other on another page.

You will need to teach writers how to cite references from a text and how to unpack these citations, talking about how the citation addresses the relevant big idea. Before this unit is over, you may want to teach children that writers of literary essays use the vocabulary of their trade, incorporating literary terms such as "narrator," "point of view," "scenes," and the like.

You may also want to teach students to write introductory paragraphs that include a tiny summary of the story. Closing paragraphs can link the story's message to the writer's own life. An alternative is to link this story to another story, or even to a social issue in the world.

A Second Option: Writing to Make a Real World Difference: Persuasive Letters, Editorials, Speeches, and Multimodal Writing

The Founding Fathers changed the course of history by creating a country based on an idea: An idea of a nation where sound argument, not bloodlines or brute force, would rule the day. In this country, therefore, the power to speak one's mind, to speak it clearly and persuasively, is more than a right and is a necessity. Every day we are called upon to explain ourselves and our beliefs—to noisy neighbors, to intransigent insurance companies, to education politicians. We defend against false accusations, we atone for mistakes, we plea for change, we stand up for what's right. Or we don't do these things, and our lives are a little darker, a little more guilt-ridden, and a little lonelier. The art of articulation, of making ourselves understood, takes practice. One of the best ways to practice speaking up is by speaking out in writing. Children need opportunities to craft logical, fluent arguments that hit home. This unit offers them chances to speak out to make a difference in their lives. Children are invited to write persuasive arguments for particular audiences, and to make those arguments as strong as possible. The genres of writing that they will explore here are real-world genres that are open to everyone. Children may select between persuasive letters, op-eds, speeches or pamphlets. Or you, as the teacher, may select between these and ask all children to write in the genre you select. Either way, children will be writing the everyday genres that have changed the course of history. We trust that children, with this kind of writing at their fingertips, will set off from our classrooms to do the same.

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Because this kind of writing demands a clear purpose and a particular audience, it offers an excellent opportunity to focus on craft and revision. A writer must ensure that the piece has a tone appropriate for the intended audience, a structure that presents ideas in a coherent sequence, and anecdotes that linger in the reader's or listener's mind. These elements are not unique to persuasive writing. You will need to remind children to use what they have learned in prior units of study to create first drafts that are already pointed and poignant, and then teach them to dig in deeper with new strategies for revision.

What Genres Will You Teach?

Before planning the unit, you will want to decide if you will teach one genre of persuasive writing or offer each child the option of choosing his or her genre from an array of choices. Your decision will determine the flow and content of the unit of study. For example, if you choose to teach only persuasive letters, then your demonstration writing will be letters. If on the other hand, children will be choosing whether to write a speech or an editorial, your mini-lessons will be geared towards the more general genre of persuasive writing, and then you will have small groups of speech writers and of editorial writers, teaching each small group some angled lessons. In that case, you will need mentor texts from both genres and some minilessons that will model how to look carefully at a mentor text and to use that text to guide each stage of the writing cycle.

A couple of possible considerations:

- If your children are fairly new to persuasive writing, you will probably want them to all work within the same genre and choose one which feels especially accessible to them.
- If you feel that you need to use your small-group strategy lessons mostly to differentiate instruction, you may choose to teach a single genre so that your time with small groups is not taken up with genre-specific teaching.
- Offering genre options could provide a way to angle your curriculum toward writing with independence.

Collecting Entries Towards Persuasive Writing

For the first few days, you will probably teach children that writers who want to make a difference in the world use writing as a way of looking inside and outside ourselves to the world around us in order to find issues that matter to us. You may want to invite children to look back at their past writing and notice if there are topics that seem to recur from entry to entry or from genre to genre. If a child's realistic fiction story centers on a character who was the victim of bullying, and her personal essay was about how hard it is when a friend won't stand up for you, it may be that this writer has, inside of her, a persuasive letter or an editorial about the toxic effects of bullying.

You may teach children that writers who want to make a difference in the world sometimes "try on" different issues that we care about, collecting a bunch of small entries in which we write, "Maybe I could write a letter to someone about" It would be

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important to teach children that when they finish one of these entries, they immediately start another. This is not one-entry-a-day writing!

Some children will struggle to grasp what exactly we mean by “writing about an issue.” In small groups, you might make the challenge more concrete: What would you like to change about recess? About your evenings? About the school day?

On a later day or in a mid-workshop interruption, you may want to teach children that we try on different ideas for persuasive writing not only by considering possible *issues* we could address, but also by considering possible *audiences*. Of course you want to be very careful that your teaching is cumulative. If on day one, you emphasize that writers reread previous writing and think, “What are some *issues* I care about?” and if, on day two, we teach that writers sometimes gather entries in which we try on possible audiences, it is crucial that each minilesson end by reminding children of the growing repertoire of options from which they can draw. The last thing you want is for every writer in the class to be doing the exact same work, in sync!

If you want to rally children towards the really big work on this unit, you can decide to teach children that writing to make a difference really means living differently. We live our everyday lives, thinking about causes worth defending, beliefs that are worth proclaiming, and concerns worth airing. One way to help children think about this is to invite them to think about times when they wish they had said something but didn’t. Is it really truly too late, or could they still find a way to speak up? Children could also think about times when they HAVE spoken out. “What do I defend that other people shoot down?” They can write to make those defenses more compelling and more lasting.

Selecting a Seed Idea and Making a Plan for Persuasive Writing

Once a child has gathered ideas for a few days, the child can reread these and settle upon a cause, a genre, and an audience. Of course the genre may not be an open question—you, the teacher, may simply say, “We’re all going to write persuasive letters.” Either way, the child will select his or her seed idea and, in this instance, that seed idea will probably include a sense of message, the genre, and the audience.

Obviously, children will now need to collect some stuff that they can say in their letter, their editorial. Based on the timeline you, the teacher, have in mind for this work, you will need to decide whether you want this collecting to occur in folders or in notebooks. Do you want the child to write out the material he or she might include, or to simply jot notes about it? This collecting phase could last for just a day (in which the writer brainstorms lists of arguments, examples and evidence) or it could last for half the week, with children actually writing their material out.

Once children have collected some material to use in whatever they are writing, you will need to remind them that after writers have spent a bit of time collecting, we need to

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think, “How might my writing go?” Then we plan the draft, and based on that planning we decide whether we need to do some more collecting or are we ready to draft.

Before you can teach children to plan (and to structure) their persuasive writing (whatever the genre may be), you need to decide on the plan for this unit. One choice is to invest this month in a single piece of writing, the text that children are now on the verge of writing. A second choice is to rush kids through a very quick sequence of work around writing persuasive letters (the most accessible alternative), and then either invite them to continue into and through a second cycle of writing persuasive letters (working towards higher standards) or else invite them to tackle a second and perhaps more complex sort of persuasive writing.

You also need to decide what your image will be for the sort of writing you hope kids do. Specifically, how do you hope your children will organize their writing? There are, of course, an infinite possible ways to organize such writing.

All options, however, will not be equally suited to your children. You will want to think about the essay writing that your children did earlier in the year, because this unit is meant to stand on the shoulders of that unit. This unit gives you and your children a chance to revisit expository writing and to extend your children’s ability. You might decide:

- that your children progressed so slowly through the personal essay unit that they do not yet have an internalized felt sense for writing a thesis-driven piece of writing. This might lead you to use this unit as a chance to help each child write several thesis driven, boxes-and-bullets pieces, learning to write these more quickly and with more voice.
- that you’d like to use this unit as a time to differentiate instruction. Whereas some of your children would profit from learning to produce quick thesis-driven essays, others would profit more from learning that all persuasive writing does not fit into a single design. You might teach some children a second common way to structure a persuasive text. If you decide to do this, you might teach them that many writers write a prolonged, well-developed story, and then offset that story with a paragraph discussing how this story is illustrative of a broader phenomenon. Such a paragraph may include facts pertaining to the broader phenomenon. All of this can then lead the writer to suggest a plan of action.
- that you want to show children that writers can look at a mentor text, notice how it is structured, and then decide to borrow that template.

Helping Writers Either Write (and Revise) an Instant Draft, or Helping Writers Collect
If you decide that you’d like children to write rather quick persuasive letters as a way to warm up towards the larger work on this unit, you will want to remind them that writers

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draw on what we already know in order to tackle new writing challenges. Specifically, writers will probably want to draw on all they learned earlier about writing with a thesis and supports, with what we refer to as boxes and bullets. You may also want to remind them that writers sometimes try to craft leads, which will pull in readers by using an anecdote, a quote, a surprising or shocking fact or a small story. When children draft their letters, you'll want to assess these drafts to understand what they know about distilling an idea into a powerful couple of sentences, coming up with different pieces of supporting evidence that truly reflect the core of the argument, and about crafting leads and conclusions that lend a sense of urgency to the issues at hand.

As mentioned earlier, you might suggest children write a bunch of different persuasive letters (much like when they write a bunch of different poems in a poetry unit) and then select one to really work on and revise. Alternatively you might suggest that once children have written effective persuasive letters, they might be ready to tackle a genre that you expected would be way too hard for them!

Recycling Through the Whole Process Yet Again

In any case, you'll want children to cycle through the beginning stages of this sort of writing more than once. If you have taught children four strategies at the start of the unit for finding issues that are compelling to them, then later in the unit (when they go to rehearse for this sort of writing again) refer to the earlier list of suggested strategies! Don't *reteach*—but do *remind*.

Rehearing: Drafting a Thesis, Collecting Material

Once children have something to say, and a genre and audience in mind, be sure to encourage them to take some time crystallizing the argument. What is it the child wants to say? This becomes the writer's thesis statement. It might be a sentence, it might be a cluster of sentences, but writers of a persuasive text need to have an argument to drive home. Once a child has a sense of what his or her main argument will be, the child needs to think about (to draft and revise) the subordinate points he or she wants to advance. What are the reasons this is so important?

Once writers have decided what they want to say, to whom, and in what sort of text, they will need to collect the material they will use to make their argument. You will recall that in the personal essay unit, children plotted out what their supportive claims would be and then collected stories, statistics, quotations and the like to support each of these claims. They collected these from loose bits of paper, compiled in folders. Writing then involved a certain amount of assembling. You will need to decide how you'd like this portion of the process to progress/work for students.

One good alternative is to remind children of what they did the last time they wrote expository tests and to encourage them to try this again, only ratcheting up the level of their work. For example, perhaps last time children took interminably long time to do this

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gathering, such as collecting one small supportive story in a single day's writing workshop. You could urge children to triple their outlay, telling them that they should be able to write more like a story to support each of their three sub-points in a day.

A second alternative is to tell children to write outlines, unlike last time when they gathered material in folders and then pieced that material together to write support paragraphs. In fact, writers oftentimes do most of this work by solely relying on rough outlines. We outline or sketch out how a draft might go, noting the stories we will marshal, the statistics we will bring out, but we rarely actually write all that material out before starting on a draft. Then we follow the outline and write a piece, organized with a thesis statement and supports.

A third alternative is to tell children to look over our material and think, "How might I organize this?" Inform children that sometimes writers think about what we have to say, collecting lots of powerful evidence and examining the best way to organize it. Only after we have gathered much information, can we look at what we've collected and how it can be arranged. When we do this, we rely on knowledge of possible text structures as well as mentor texts, but try to devise a structure that will allow us to make best use of our material.

Either way, you will also need to teach children to collect compelling material to support their claim. You might remind children that it can help to think, "What are my reasons for believing this?" Certainly you will want to remind them to write brief vivid focused anecdotes that bear on the issue they are writing about. Remind them that in the personal essay unit they learned to write other people's stories as well as their own and to include statistics. You and your children can study persuasive texts you admire and glean other ideas for the sort of material you will want to collect. For example, you are apt to find that many well-written pieces of persuasive writing rely on an image that functions almost as a central metaphor.

Organizing, Drafting, and Using Mentor Texts

For all writers and all our writing, mentor texts are especially important when we make the transition from gathering material towards writing a draft. Remind children that writers often return to texts we have read and studied earlier. If a writer is just about to draft, we are apt to look at mentor texts noticing and asking how that mentor lays out its material. You will no doubt choose a few carefully selected texts to show children optional ways to organize. For example, one template which you forward will no doubt resemble the writing they have already learned to do, in which a writer forwards a claim, provides reasons, and elaborates upon each reason in sequence. You may decide to also show children that many times, writers put forth the examples—the bullets, you could say, (in a boxes and bullets design) and only afterwards connect with the author's argument, the "box." Then, too, some texts are organized into gigantic lists, with more than 2-3 "boxes," none of them very well developed.

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Revising Writing to Make it Influential and Memorable

You'll want to remind children that by this time in the year, their knapsacks of revision strategies are already bulging. Bring out the charts from the earlier unit on writing essays, and also bring out the essays that kids produced. Remind children that writers use strategies forever and ever, over and over. Encourage them to think up ways to make their writing more powerful, more memorable.

Among all that the kids invent and try, you will also want to highlight a few revision goals. The biggest is this: You will want your writers to reread and revise, and to do so by taking their readers into account. Teach them that writers pretend to be their own readers. We step outside of ourselves, pick up the text as if we have never seen it before, and we read it. We notice the sections that are convincing, and those that make us flick the paper away. We notice where the draft loses energy and where it makes the reader feel skeptical. As part of this exercise, children might practice altering their arguments so they are persuasive to different people. You might show them that if your goal is less homework and you are trying to convince the principal of this, then it might be more convincing to argue that a child could have more family time or more time for community service than to argue that a child could watch more of his or her favorite shows!

Persuasive writing can be more or less complex, and teachers will want to decide what else to weave into this unit. For example, you may decide to teach writers that nothing is more persuasive than information. Every writer who wants to hit home an argument has used precise information to do so, and this could mean that, as part of this unit, a teacher might want to teach children how to use the internet to search for precise evidence – statistics, a quotation to illustrate a topic sentence.

Of course revision is another time for studying mentor texts. Teach students to go back to their pieces and to try out the kinds of rhetorical gestures that their mentors have made, including the use of purposeful repetition (as in Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech) and the use of "zingers" that drive home the point in a quotable way.

Publishing: Make it Real

In this unit, publishing is truly the most important part of the writing cycle. Since audience is a key element in the students' considerations throughout the process, it will be key for them to actually deliver the work to that audience. Speeches must be performed! Letters must be mailed! Publishing will involve making sure that the child's writing reaches the intended audience. The letters to Coca-Cola and Nike need to be mailed. The letters asking authors to come to a school need to be sent. The editorials about peer pressure or bullying need to be submitted to publications. Some children may mail editorials to student periodicals; others might hand deliver their letters to people in their lives. It is important that children's writing goes out into the world so that it can make a difference.

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At the end of this unit, you'll probably want to assess your children's abilities to write expository texts. We'll provide more information as the time draws near. After the writing has reached its destination, students may reflect on the process, on how writing persuasively changed the way they thought about the issue or concern they chose, and finally how the audience's reaction or lack thereof (in the case of students who receive no replies) also affects their thinking.

Spring Vacation: Independent Writing Projects

Some teachers find that spring vacation offers an excellent time for students to tackle an independent writing project. Carl Anderson says that one of the best ways to assess students authentically is to see what work they do independently. By seeing what your students are able to accomplish without your daily minilessons and conferences to guide them, you can gauge just how "sticky" your teaching has been. You might want to ask students to choose a writing project to work on over the vacation. When they return, you can have a mini-celebration to admire all of their hard work.

Unit 7 – Poetry

April

"Poetry is the school I went to in order to learn prose."

Overview of the Unit

You will want to author your own unit of study on writing poetry. You can draw upon professional books including books by Georgia Heard. The poetry book in *Units of Study for Primary Writing* also suggests a curriculum that could be as adapted to older writers. As always, you will want to think first about the work that you hope children do in this unit. We encourage you to invite each child to select a topic of tremendous importance to that child, and then to write an anthology of poems about that one topic. If you do decide on this, you could also invite children to find poems that others have written on the same topic, perhaps deciding to include a few selected poems by other authors in the child's anthology.

Collecting: Using our Lives and Previous Entries to Find Subjects for Poetry

As in any unit of study, you will want to launch the unit by helping children learn how to live writerly lives. As in previous units, you will probably want to remind your young poets that they can find significance in the big issues and ordinary details of their lives, gathering entries and images and lists that might later be developed into publishable texts. Teach them to pay close attention to images or entries that have surprising beauty, to reconsider memories, to ponder conversations. They can also search for ideas in past entries. You may make this unit a time for close observation, teaching students to select scenes, places and images that represent gigantically important topics, and then to look with depth and honesty at those places, scenes and images.

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Reading Poetry Aloud

All through the unit, children will read poems out loud so that they can learn how to savor the sounds of this genre. Help them to talk and think about the difference in sound and meaning between fry and sizzle, shine and sparkle, cry and weep. Ideally, they'll hear how the right choice of words can make a poem funny or wistful or sad. They'll learn to create "mind pictures" by placing an ordinary thing up next to something it's never been compared to before: "Today the sky looks soft and worn, like my old baby blanket." Children may learn how to shape words on the page so that their texts not only sound but also *look* like poems. That is, they will learn that poets think about where to break a line so that the sound, rhythm, and look of each line achieve the overall tone and meaning that the poet wishes to convey. They will learn how poets use the "white space" around the words to pause, take a breath, and make something stand out from all the other words.

Drafting, Crafting and Revising Poetry: Considering Poetic Forms, Rehearsing in multiple ways, and Finding and Revising for Meaning

You will probably emphasize free verse poetry. Rhyming well is a precise skill that many adult poets find difficult to master! Teach children to aim first for meaning, and for finding a way to describe what matters with words that will make the reader see the world in a brand new way.

Once students have many beginnings and first tries of poems in their notebooks, teach them that as poets draft new poems and re-work poems they have already written, they try out many different versions of their poems. Poets make changes to better express what they most want to convey to the reader. They sometimes find that the act of revision brings new and more powerful ideas: What they want to say may change as they play with the way they're saying it.

But above all, the secret of poetry is heart. Poets write from the heart. Poets teach all of us to look at the world differently. They help us to celebrate small beauties. They inspire us to be outraged over injustices great and small. And so, in this unit, focus on the work that poets do in the world, the way that poets love the world through words. Focus on the way poets sustain us during hard times, the way poets express outrage and grief and joy.

Unit 8 – Memoir: Teach the Art of Writing Well

May

Overview of the Unit

In order to put ourselves on the page with honesty and intensity, we and our children need to write within a community of trust. As we 'round the final bend of the year, this is a good time to teach what it means to really listen to each other and to ourselves.

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To teach this unit well, you'll want to read either Katherine Bomer's *Writing a Life* or *Memoir: The Art of Writing Well* from the series: *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3-5*. Plan on this being an amazing, beautiful, moving, climatic unit. In this unit of study on memoir, you can teach children to compose pieces of writing but also to compose lives in which writing matters. When we, as writers, really listen to ourselves and each other, an entry or a topic can grow in significance.

Collecting: Writing to Discover Our Thinking and Writing With Depth

At the start of the unit, you may want to invite children to search for Life Topics. Life Topics can be found by rereading notebooks, reconsidering lives, and by living, conscious of the topics that feel intensely alive and close to the heart. Children often begin by writing about gigantic Life Topics, such as ambivalence over growing older, worries over weight, an appreciation for one's grandmother. A second-step will be to remind them of the saying, "The bigger the topic, the smaller we write."

In some classes, children in this unit of study refer to their seed idea as a *blob* idea, imagining a glowing, living, amorphous form. Children learn that the process of choosing a seed idea is a more flexible one than they'd first learned, and that, as they live with a Life Topic, their sense of what it is they really want to say changes. You will probably encourage writers to use writing as a way to develop their own ideas and associations around a Life Topic, writing-to-learn in their writers' notebooks.

If you are angling this unit so as to support independence, you will probably tell children, "This time, you need to compose a writing life for yourself. You can draw on any strategy you have learned this year, or invent new strategies. Your job is to decide what to do in order to write something that captures all you want to say." This unit, then, allows you to encourage children to shake free from any scaffolds that limit them, to make resourceful use of scaffolds that help, and to do all this in the service of their own important writing projects. As children invent this writing project, they will also be inventing their own identities as writers, preparing themselves to go forth with independence into the rest of their lives.

In this unit, your emphasis will probably not be so much on strategies for *generating* writing as on strategies for *writing with depth*. For example, you may want to teach children that writers sometimes find it helpful to write about a single topic from several perspectives. Usually ideas about any one topic are complicated, so once a writer has written about one set of ideas on a topic, the writer can come back and revisit the topic, writing an entry that begins, "On the other hand . . ." In the end, some of the best writing will result from efforts to get mental and emotional arms around the full breadth of a topic. Then, too, we teach children the wisdom of Eudora Welty's advice, "Write what you *don't know* about what you know." Where are the mysteries, the questions, the feelings of angst for you in this beloved, close-to-home topic?

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Using Literature to Support Memoir Writing

Children will read literature in this unit first because great literature can serve, as Kafka writes, “as an ice-axe to break the frozen sea within us.” Literature calls us from our hiding places, helping us to bring ourselves to the page. The importance of this can’t be over-emphasized. Of any quality of good writing, the one which matters the most may be that elusive quality writers refer to as *voice*. A person writes with voice when that person allows the imprint of his or her personality to come through in his or her writing.

But children also read literature in order to study the craftsmanship of other writers. Because children have responsibility for imagining a way to structure their memoir, they will read the memoir that other authors have written with a special attentiveness to structure. That is, in this unit, you may not want to say, “This is how your writing will be structured.” Instead, you may decide to teach children that writers often begin with an emerging content, and then combine and create structures (drawing from our internalized repertoire of structures) that will allow us to say whatever it is we want say.

As children develop their seed idea (or their “blob” if it feels too big to be called a seed!), it will be crucial for them to ask themselves, “What is it I really want to say?” This is a memoir, so the draft will not be about the events alone. Instead, it will be about the person to whom those events happened. Children need to think, “Who do I want to be in this writing?” “What am I trying to say about myself in this piece?” “What am I realizing about myself as I write this?” “What do I want my readers to know about me?” Once a child has begun to figure out what he or she is trying to say, it will be important to deliberately write in ways that highlight that meaning.

Although writers can make calculated decisions to organize a text in one way or another, the actual process of writing is more passion-hot than critic-cold. Milton Meltzer, the great nonfiction writer for children, has said, “In the writer who cares, there is a pressure of feelings which emerges the rhythm of sentences, in the choice of details, in the color of the language.”

Drafting: Calling Forward What We Know About Structure and Creating Our Own Structure

When it comes time for children to begin thinking about starting a draft, you’ll want to invite each child to first plan out how his or her piece might go. It helps to tell children that when a writer’s content is so rich and so precious to us, we don’t just pour it into a pre-fabricated form. Instead we invent a form that will carry the message we want to convey. Will the piece contain one focused narrative? Two stories held together by some exposition? Will there be a thesis and development?

You’ll want to invite children to study pieces which illustrate that writers often combine narrative as well as essay structures into single pieces which defy easy labels. “Eleven,” by Sandra Cisneros from *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* could be in that

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folder—and don't worry if children have studied it before. I also recommend "Not Enough Emilys" from *Hey, World, Here I Am* by Jean Little and "My Grandmother's Hair" by Cynthia Rylant from the anthology *Home*. You may want to invite children to examine their texts for structure, boxing out sections that resemble the narratives they will have written all year and sections that resemble essays.

Some children will write their narratives as a story, while others will write a collection of short texts. Some children will write essays that are more journeys of-thought rather than traditional thesis-driven essays. The choice of structure needs to be left in the writer's hands this time. Mostly, children discover that the structures they've learned to use throughout the year are not as inflexible as they once thought, and they create texts which are hybrids, containing perhaps one long narrative section set off against a thesis-driven expository paragraph.

As children create structures that will support their content, they will learn about revision in a whole new way. They will come to understand that writing is a process of growing meaning, and that writers use strategies as needed, as we reach to create meanings that feel deeply significant and personal.

Unit 9: Independent Writing Projects

June

Overview of the Unit

The end of a school year full of intense writing work is a time to celebrate all that students know, as well as a time for our students to think ahead to how they will live as writers during the summer and all through their lives. The more we can set our students free to generate, plan, draft, and revise on their own, the more the dream of creating "lifelong" writers will become true. In this unit, children will be given the opportunity to envision and create (or begin to create) their own writing masterpieces. All year you have taught your students narrative and non-narrative structures, which writing is a process, and that writers write in a variety of genre. Now you will show them how to synthesize what they have learned in order to navigate through a project of their choice.

Mentoring our Writing: Using Literature to Support Independent Writing

Favorite authors will serve as the mentors and guides for children to learn from independently. Before this unit begins, you will need to gather texts that are familiar to your students or resemble the kind of writing you predict they will lean towards. You might look through the short texts you used during earlier units of study that became old favorites. Many of us love to use books like Fox's *Koala Lou*, Baylor's *I'm In Charge of Celebrations*, Little's *Hey World Here I Am*, or Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*, for children to prop up alongside their own writing and use as their guide and teacher.

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You may also decide to bring in literature that played a prominent role in other curricular areas, such as reading workshop or social studies, which your students are familiar with and might want to emulate. For example, you might bring in narrative nonfiction such as *Martin's Big Words* or letter-books such as *Dear Mr. Blueberry* or anthologies such as *Free to Be You and Me*. Sometimes even magazines, such as *Storyworks*, contain a host of possibilities for mentoring possibilities.

It helps to teach explicit minilessons highlighting craft techniques in these mentor texts. For example, in one minilesson you might spotlight the ways Mem Fox gives her animal characters realistic-sounding dialogue, or you might emphasize that Byrd Baylor paints pictures of desert life in our minds with her precise, poetic word choices. You could then show your students how they can make similar moves in their own writing, even though their writing topics might differ from talking animals and deserts.

Bringing Forward What We Know About Good Writing

To begin this unit you will need to remind students of the writing they have done this year and the process they went through. This is the perfect time to pull out charts that the students might not have seen since September, and point out how the class has been moving through the process month after month, piece after piece. You will then move on to teaching students independent writing skills such as: developing realistic project ideas, recording their ideas in their notebooks, using their writing notebooks to develop their ideas, creating time-lines for how their work will proceed, holding themselves accountable to their plans, learning craft from a mentor author (or text), and drawing upon a repertoire of strategies that have been used all year (i.e. zooming in on important moments, creating tension, layering with multiple points of view, observing closely, editing for the readers' eyes, and so forth). Colleen Cruz's book *Independent Writing* is a good resource for this unit.

Some teachers find that working on independent projects requires additional classroom structures that develop as the unit unfolds. Supports such as students filling out proposal forms explaining their plans for independent projects, providing calendars for student-set deadlines, a bulletin board to keep track of independently published pieces and a freshened-up writing center with new paper choices, can all help a teacher manage independent projects with ease.

You'll also hold in your mind that, even though all year long you've been working during your minilessons and conferences to "teach the writer, not the writing," there are few units in your year that bring the import of that statement more to life than when you are teaching your students *how* to move through their own independent projects as opposed to a genre the class is moving through together. You will plan for instruction knowing that you cannot rely on knowledge of a genre alone to guide your teaching, but rather on your knowledge of process and universal qualities of writing such as structure, focus, elaboration, and word choice. Students will also learn how to develop their talk skills

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around writing as they develop partnerships and writing clubs. We can teach students how to support each other's forays into independent pieces while also learning to give helpful suggestions and feedback. These systems of student interdependence will become a key scaffold in moving our students towards independence even as our students learn to rely on the larger writing community.

Overall, this unit is a time for reflection, assessment, and celebration for you and your students. You and your class will reflect on how they have grown as writers this year. You will assess how much they are able to navigate independently through the writing process and the repertoire of writing skills they have developed. You and your class will be able to celebrate their beautiful masterpieces that are proof of all they have learned this year. And finally, you will find ways to help them build a bridge to their summer, their next year in school, and to project themselves into the future as writers. You will remind them that their writing lives can and will continue throughout the summer and beyond.